New Testament
Toaru Majutsu no Index 3

Gremlin is an enemy force on a global scale that is a fusion of magic and science. This mysterious organization appeared suddenly at the end of World War III and they seem to be taking secret actions in America's 50th state, Hawaii.

Under the guidance of Leivinia Birdway, the boss of the British Golden-style magic cabal the Dawn-Colored Sunlight, Kamijou and the others head to Hawaii. The members of the group are Kamijou Touma, Misaka Mikoto, Accelerator, Hamazura Shiage, Misaka Worst, and Kuroyoru Umidori. And as soon as they arrive at New Honolulu International Airport, an attack by a Gremlin magician begins.

Gremlin's plot continues underneath the surface. The one man in America who has realized this is searching for a means to resist them on his own. The man is extremely high tension and can get a little carried away.

He is Roberto Katze.

As the President of the United States, everyone knows who he is.

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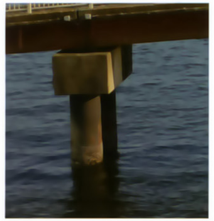

Kamachi Kazuma

This time it's the sea. You can head out to a place you normally never go and splash around. Hawaii gives me quite a different impression, but things might look quite beautiful here too once night falls.

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Toaru Majutsu no Index 1~22
Toaru Majutsu no Index SS 1 & 2
New Testament Toaru Majutsu no Index 1~3
Heavy Object
Heavy Object: Adoption War
Heavy Object: Shadow of the Giants
Heavy Object: Treasure of Electronic Mathematics
Heavy Object: Festival of Death

Illustrator: Haimura Kiyotaka

I'm originally from Onomichi City of Hiroshima Prefecture. Now I live in a certain area of Kantou living a half hikikomori life while drawing illustrations.

カバー／暁印刷

新約

とある魔術の禁書目録

インデックス

鎌池和馬

イラスト／
はいむらきよたか

3

"Oh, come on. I'm the US president, so ask me questions about the US. That's like bringing up another woman in the middle of dinner."

President of the United States and therefore the commander-in-chief of the American armed forces

Roberto Katze

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The_Old_Glory.

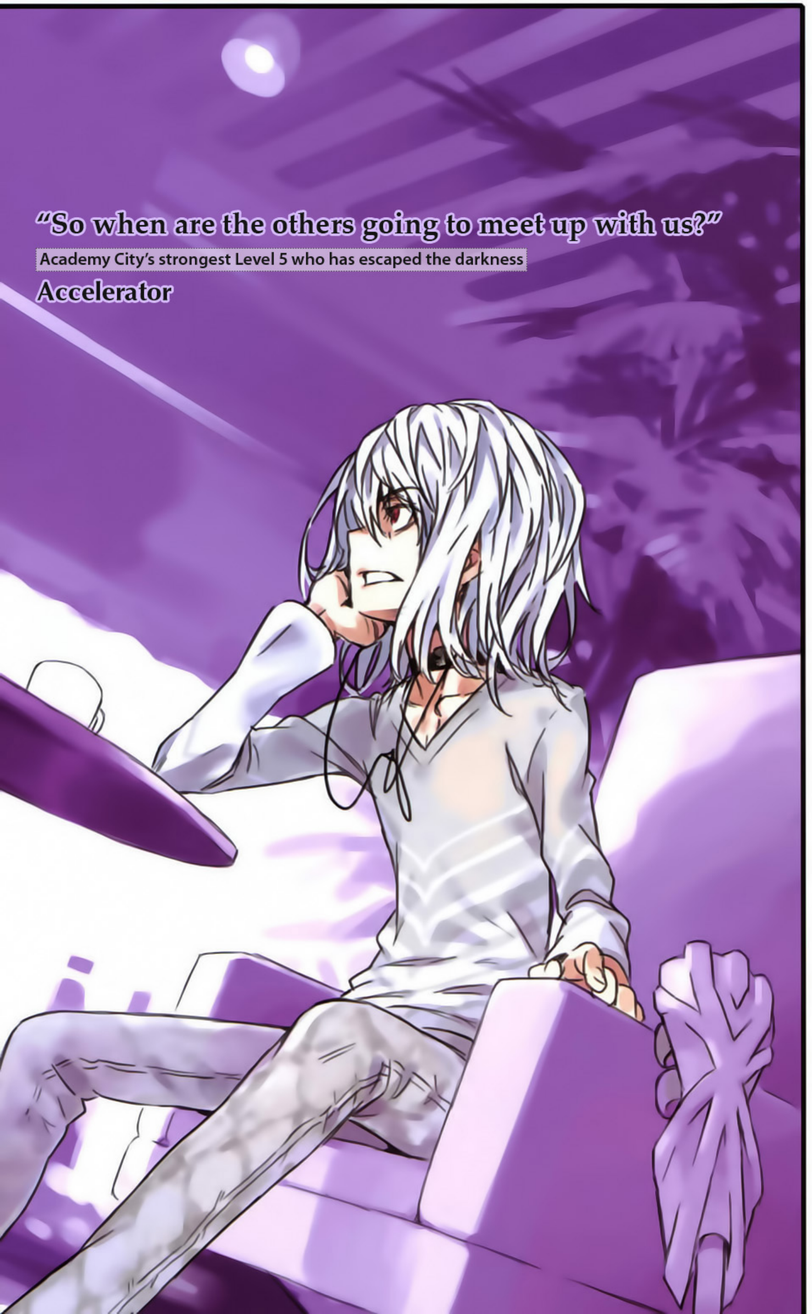
Queen_Period.

"You're up, Mr. Secret Trick."

Magician of Gremlin, an organization that is a fusion of science and magic

Saronia A. Irivika

Designed by **H**irokazu **W**atanabe(2725 Inc.)


"So when are the others going to meet up with us?"
Academy City's strongest Level 5 who has escaped the darkness
Accelerator

"Kuro-nyaaan. Do you really think we would've put together this plan if we had no way of winning?"
Clone of Misaka Mikoto created by the Sisters Third Season
Misaka Worst
"Y'know, how are we supposed to search for someone suspicious with so many tourists around?"
A Level 0 who went from being an underling to a proper member of the new Item
Hamazura Shiage
"Gyah-gyah gyah gyah gyah!?"
Former member of the Freshmen of Academy City's dark side.
A girl who had herself turned into a cyborg of her own free will
Kuroyoru Umidori

(...Wah wah wah!! We're overseas all of a sudden! The Dorm Supervisor and Kuroko aren't watching. What do I do!?)
Academy City and Tokiwadai Middle School's Level 5
Misaka Mikoto
"...I guess Birdway and the others aren't here yet. This is where we were supposed to meet up with them, though."
Academy City's Level 0 student
Kamijou Touma

"I started this game, and I have an idea as to how I'm going to end it."

Boss girl of the Magic Cabal known as the Dawn-Colored Sunlight

Leivinia Birdway

"Please give me the test of the glass slippers. Please give me the strict and cruel test of the glass slippers that dropped my selfish and dishonest mother and sisters to the bottom of the pit of despair."

Magician of Gremlin, an organization that is a fusion of science and magic

Cendrillon

TOARU MAJUTSU NO INDEX NEW TESTAMENT

新約

とある魔術の禁書目録

インデックス

3

KAMACHI KAZUMA
鎌池和馬
イラスト・はいむらきよたか
HAIMURA KIYOTAKA

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PROLOGUE

In the Fiftieth State.

Crisis_of_Blue_Ocean.

Part 1

(November 10th – Oahu – Press Conference Room – From footage taken by an EAC News relay camera)

"Time is quite valuable, so let's keep the greetings short. I'm sure the ladies, gentlemen, and cameramen lined up here don't want to be buried in flowery speech and I know the viewers at home always want something a little more stimulating."

He was a man in his forties. His finely chiseled Latin features had a dreadfulness and wildness not found in a teenage delinquent. Muscles outdoing those of your average athlete were hidden below his tanned skin. The lack of an aura of intelligence was unfortunate, but the fault lay with the citizens who chose him.

He was Roberto Katze.

He was the President of the United States and the third Hispanic person to hold that position. If you mentioned that fact, he would readily reply that there was no point in taking pride in anything you were not first in and that he would rather be referred to as the first president to be a high school dropout. That was just the kind of person he was.

The suit, tie, leather shoes, and everything else he was wearing were all from supporting groups, but they seemed more forced on him than things he had chosen himself. He had a rare talent in his ability to fill his faults with a sense of familiarity that kept him from seeming sloppy.

"And so let's start with the questions. I gave the general outline of the plan at the address two hours ago, so try not to ask me anything I've already answered. Wasting our precious time will only make you the laughing stock of your viewers."

“Mr. President,” said one of the reporters after raising his hand. “You said the giant golden rings and bones that appeared at the end of World War III were being disposed of in the ocean near Hawaii, but *why did we accept those useless pieces of junk*?”

“What a boring question. I guess the Condor has more troubles than just the slump in readers.”

“Why is this being done in our waters rather than international waters? Is there some political reason behind that?”

“It’s much simpler than that.” The president lightly shook his index finger. “Each of those objects is dozens of meters across. If that many were just dumped all over the ocean, it would cause a change in the ocean currents. That change could harm the oceanic ecosystem and the supply of things like plankton and oxygen, and that would be a problem. ‘We’ searched all over the oceans of the world and the acceptable zone we found just so happened to be near Hawaii. Do you understand?”

“But it seems the local fishers and surfers are raising their voices in concern…”

“The results of the calculations by the Glamorous Devil were given to them. That’s the nickname of the supercomputer in Florida, in case you didn’t know. Anyway, from what I hear, they all fell asleep only 20 minutes into the explanation. It seems to me that they trust our conclusion.”

“Some claim that they are being dragged to our waters so they can be recovered and studied in secret.”

“You need to be careful about what you say, Mr. Reporter. This is something that hasn’t even happened yet, so that is nothing more than speculation. And to be even more accurate, it is a speculation from some Anti-American propaganda being distributed from a German intelligence agency. …Whoops, I probably shouldn’t have named the country. I was supposed to keep the friction with the EU a secret.”

When the president even stuck out his tongue in front of the camera, the young reporter let his head hang down and his shoulders shook to hold back his anger. Getting people to let secrets slip was part of his job, but that had been more like a present given to him by the president. The president was not even allowing the game to begin. In a column printed in the London Ingod, he had been referred to as a strange politician who upped his approval rating using verbal slips like that.

A female reporter raised her hand.

“It seems the EU is planning to dispose of their golden rings and bones via the Atlantic Ocean, but they do not have enough sources of funds to cover it. Do you have any comments on that?”

“Oh, come on. I’m the US president, so ask me questions about the US. That’s like bringing up another woman in the middle of dinner.”

“And if I record that as proof of sexual harassment?”

“When I truly go after a woman, I give her such a memorable experience that any previous complaints are blown away.”

A middle-aged reporter then butted into the conversation.

“Mr. Scandal, it sounds like you’re going back on your marriage proposal, so are you going to be the first single president now?”

“Nick, I can’t change who I am. Or maybe I should become the first US president to go bankrupt from divorce reparations. But I’d have to have at least as many exes as there are states to manage that.”

Part 2

(November 10th – Oahu – Near the Press Conference Room – From the footage taken by a tourist’s video camera)

“Mama, where’s the president?”

“We might be able catch a glimpse of him.”

A blonde girl of about five was in the center of the frame and a motherly voice could be heard from out of the frame. The blonde girl was waving around a small American flag.

“If we wait here, will I be able to shake his hand?”

“That could be difficult. They’ve been getting stricter lately due to terrorist attacks. We might not even be able to get near the convoy of black cars.”

The mother’s response may have sounded harsh, but that was the state of things. If she did not tell her daughter that, then the girl could very well get away from her mother and charge for the line of cars.

Due to the recent war, the strange state of security was beyond description. When it came to protecting the president, they would mercilessly “neutralize” even a five year old girl.

But that was also why a video that even caught a glimpse of the president’s face was valuable enough to boast about to the neighborhood.

“Huh?”

“What is it, Jenny?”

“It’s the president. The president is coming this way. Heyyy!”

The footage from the video camera shook in confusion.

Even if the girl was only five, she saw the president on the news each morning. The mother doubted she would mistake someone else for him, but…

Suddenly, the footage shook wildly.

It became almost impossible to see what was going on.

It was snatched away.

The mother had pointed the lens in the direction her daughter had pointed, but someone had grabbed the camera from her hand.

As the frame showed the young mother’s stomach at an angle, adults speaking could be heard from outside the frame.

“Kyahh!? Why are you…Bfh!? M-M-Mr. President!?”

“Sorry, missus! I’ll be borrowing this for a second,” said Roberto Katze in a very different tone from when he spoke on TV. “Unfortunately, I haven’t gotten so indiscriminate that I go after mothers, so I hope we can keep this quick!!”

“W-wait, why are you here!?”

“Mr. President, can I shake your hand?”

In the shaking footage, a large Hispanic man could be seen politely shaking the small girl’s hand and then rubbing her head with his large hand. The frame was then filled with his face.

His gaze darted around as he spoke quickly.

“You may not believe me, but something strange is going on in the center of the government. The details are unclear at the moment, but it’s being caused by an external factor. People who were completely normal the day before are suddenly becoming enemies of America as if they are being controlled by someone else. How good a person they were originally makes no difference. I cannot deny the possibility that the same will eventually happen to me if I stay in the White House. As such, I will be making sure no one knows where I am for a while.” As he spoke, the president’s rapid breathing must have been hitting the microphone because static would mix in at irregular intervals. “I repeat. I am disappearing of my own free will. I have not been abducted by some third party. I hope that whoever sees this is able to act rationally. From now on, I will be acting as a member of the US government in order to deal with the danger that is growing in this country.”

After saying that, the footage shook greatly. It seemed he had handed the camera back to the mother. The camera was still shaky, but it now showed the president’s entire body.

He was holding a small attaché case in one hand and was gently shooing the holder of the camera back with the other.

“You don’t need to contact the police. I doubt it would help if you did. There is a reason that I am leaving this message so that it can be heard by others. You two should just enjoy your time in Hawaii.”

The president then left the still-confused mother and forced his way across a road filled with cars. Shortly thereafter, the back entrance of the press conference room opened and a number of men in black suits cut past the camera.

“Well, that was certainly more than a glimpse,” said the mother getting excited at the treasure of a video she held in her hands.

“Maybe I can marry the president.”

Her daughter’s dangerous words brought her back to her senses.

CHAPTER 1

Which Side Will Deliver a Preemptive Strike?

First_Contact.

Part 1

(November 10th – Oahu – New Honolulu International Airport Customs Gate – From security camera footage.)

Though it was neither the middle of the summer tourist season nor the middle of the winter tourist season, the area around the gate was packed with people. Since one of Hawaii's main industries was tourism, holding that many people up for so long could easily be seen as a breakdown in the system.

The crowd was mostly made up of tourists, businessmen, transportation workers, and people with cards hanging from their necks that were here most likely to conduct research into volcanoes or tropical fish. However a few people in the crowd clearly did not fit into any of those categories.

For instance, there was a spiky-haired Asian.

And there was the #3 Level 5 walking beside him.

While the two could probably be classified as tourists, a boy and girl wandering through an international airport without a guide or parents was peculiar.

"…I guess Birdway and the others aren't here yet. This is where we were supposed to meet up with them, though," muttered the boy, Kamijou Touma.

For how little of the English language he knew, he seemed oddly used to being overseas. However, just a few minutes before while on the plane, he had been trembling in his seat. From what he muttered about things like parachutes and speeds of 7,000 kph, he must have had some dreadful memories related to airplanes.

As for the girl, Misaka Mikoto…

"(…Wah wah wah!! I-I did spontaneously tell him that he wouldn't be alone this time, but I didn't expect to end up overseas all of a sudden! The dorm supervisor and Kuroko aren't watching. What do I do!? I doubt this is just a day trip; we're probably going to be spending the night. What do I do, what do I do!?)"

The unparalleled "Onee-sama"—when viewed from the eyes of a middle school girl—was blushing and panicking, but Kamijou showed no sign of noticing as he sat on his suitcase and fanned himself with his hand.

The girl was so psyched that she could barely keep up with the present, so she was wholly incapable of asking herself questions about what they were doing there, and why they were meeting up with others who had flown in small groups on separate flights.

An electronic tone sounded from the announcement speakers set up in various places around the airport.

Kamijou Touma looked up, but he frowned upon hearing a woman's voice speaking fluent English.

"…What is she saying?"

"I can't believe you would cross the ocean without knowing that much. How did you manage to answer the questions of the officials at customs?" Mikoto muttered in disbelief, but she added more quietly to herself, "(…Does that mean he has no choice but to rely on my knowledge of English? Fwoh!? Has the time finally come for me to seize the initiative in our actions here!?)"

As she mumbled to herself, she started to tremble for some reason.

Part 2

(November 10th – Oahu – New Honolulu International Airport Terminal Three – Café Simple Coconut – From the camera in a pet robot in the café.)

In the sort of airport café where four-fifths of the price was due to the location alone, Leivinia Birdway took a sip from a coffee cup and grimaced.

"…I expected this to be sweet, but not this much. It has enough calories to rival an energy drink for a marathon runner."

"You should've been able to tell that from the way it looks. It's pure white. And how about you read the name of the place aloud too," spat out Accelerator, Academy City's #1 Level 5.

Birdway started shoveling in some tapioca which had come with her drink and said, "What a gentle tone of voice."

"Ahn?"

"You seem used to dealing with kids, but you don't need to switch over to that mode with me."

"…"

"If you're going to act as my escort, it would help if you would treat me like a lady. Especially regarding my personal pride."

"Tch," Accelerator clicked his tongue and took a sip of weak coffee.

It seemed like he hadn't noticed how he was acting until she pointed it out.

He decided it would be best not to use his cell phone. He did not want anyone to know that he was contemplating whether he could contact "that brat" or not.

The enemy was already on the island.

It was possible their conversation was being monitored even now, and anything he let them know could possibly be used against him.

"So when are the others going to meet up with us?"

"I have no way of knowing when their flights arrived or how busy their gates are," Birdway said simply as she battled with the contents of her cup that she was treating as a dessert. "Even if Aleister's influence has weakened, it was difficult to get that many people out of Academy City. If you had all gotten on the same flight, we would have been tracked for sure. I had us split into small groups in order to eliminate the risk as much as possible. I bought our safety with money and time, so quit complaining."

That must have been why the men wearing black that usually surrounded her were nowhere to be seen.

It seemed their absence did not bother Birdway too much.

“Now that Gremlin has confirmed Imagine Breaker’s survival using Radiosonde Castle, they will be preparing themselves for interference from and coming up with countermeasures against that natural enemy of magic. They are sure to carry out something big here in Hawaii. We followed them here in order to stop them, but we are not the world police. We cannot slip past everything by using special rules, so we need to make the proper preparations before beginning the fight.”

“…Can’t you pull it off somehow with that magic of yours?”

“I probably could if it came to it, but it comes down to the dilemma of a phantom thief. Any method I use once will be analyzed. If I have a different way of dealing with it, I don’t want to use any of my major techniques.”

“So it’s all for your convenience,” Accelerator muttered in annoyance. “You said Gremlin is hiding here in Hawaii, right?”

“Yes, in all likelihood.”

“But how are we supposed to find them? There are eight main islands, and if you count the small ones, there are around 130. There are over 1.4 million residents alone and adding in the temporary visitors gives you a total of over 3 million people. I doubt we’re gonna find these hidden people just by running around randomly.”

“I have an idea of how to deal with that.”

At the same time, Accelerator heard an electronic tone.

Birdway looked up toward the ceiling.

“Looks like it’s starting.”

Part 3

(November 10th – Oahu – New Honolulu International Airport Terminal Two – From the camera in an automatic guidance kiosk.)

Hamazura Shiage was standing before a large board within the airport.

To be precise, it was an electronic guidance board. Instead of just showing a map, it had a keyboard that allowed entry of one’s destination so it could display the way there. It also had a voice recognition function so that users could be connected to an operator, but that was no help for Hamazura because he could not speak English at all.

Not to mention that something else was further inhibiting his already regrettable level of knowledge.

It was a girl of about twelve that stood next to him.

She was Kuroyoru Umidori.

She was a cyborg girl who had been at the center of the Freshmen, an organization from the dark side of Academy City, and whose body itself was a mass of engineering secrets.

"…Why did I have to end up grouped with you of all people!? Wasn't there some better combination that had a little less bad blood from the past, or at least someone I could overpower if it came to it!?"

"I'm the one that was fucking kidnapped, Haaamaaa-chaaaan!"

"Nooo!! Your speech pattern has changed by default!!"

"God dammit. First you say you can't just leave me be in Academy City 'cause I'm likely to attack Fremea again, but you also couldn't bring yourself to kill me. You were a little too optimistic to think you could solve that conundrum just by bringing me with you. You didn't think about the fact that you'd then have to worry about the possibility of me ripping your fucking throat out at any time, did you!?"

"Normally, my biggest worry about a trip to Hawaii would've been what souvenir to get my lovely Takitsubo-chan!! I'd be wondering if she would think something like macadamia nuts is too clichéd, or if she would be glad I was sticking to the basics! So why is my life endangered before I've even left the airport!?"

And like that, Hamazura Shiage was already thrust into grave danger.

He had thought that Kuroyoru had not attacked him up to that point because she thought it would be easier to escape if she was outside of Japan first.

However, the deadly cyborg did not carry out a terrorist attack with her Bomber Lance.

Before she could, another figure approached from behind.

It was Misaka Worst.

The ao dai-wearing girl with a mischievous glint in her eyes and her dominant hand in a cast wrapped one arm around the cyborg's neck.

"Kuro-nyaaan."

"!?"

“You can do whatever you want, but do you really think we would’ve put together this plan if we had no way of winning?”

“Gyah gyah gyah gyah gyah!?”

Kuroyoru suddenly started howling because Misaka Worst had used her ability to manipulate electricity on the cyborg control mechanisms.

The usually cool girl may have suddenly shouted “Trans☆form!!” and made a strange pose, but there were valid reasons for doing so. It was not a prank that would have helped a school counselor to earn his keep.

“Nyah nyah… gyah…”

“Ha ha ha. You should count yourself lucky that Misaka didn’t mess with the ones for your organs. Mechas like you just aren’t suited for facing electricity-type espers like Misaka. Did you not do your research beforehand, nyan?”

“D-damn those bastards on the board of directors…”

“Oh? Do you think the ban on cyborg development was lifted in order to back the Third Season project? It’s possible, but there’s no proof, so it’s really nothing but unjustified resentment. And really, this kind of security hole could probably be closed in two weeks or so if they actually bothered. Misaka had a selector put inside her, after all.”

However, no matter how easily-fillable a hole it was, it was still a major weakness until it was filled.

And Hawaii did not have anything like Academy City’s research facilities.

“I-I’m saved…” said Hamazura as he wiped sweat from his brow.

“Hmm? Misaka never said anything about being on your side, nyahh.”

“I was right! Someone made a serious error when they made these groups!!” shouted Hamazura, but the two girls soaked in darkness didn’t appear to react.

Like a delinquent, Misaka Worst leaned up with overt familiarity against Kuroyoru as the other girl’s arms continued to convulse slightly. Misaka Worst then spoke to the cyborg with a stifling sense of superiority at having complete control over the situation.

“Y’know, how are we supposed to search for someone suspicious with so many tourists around? With so many unfamiliar outsiders all over the place, even asking around doesn’t sound like much help.”

“…What would you do if it was fucking up to you?”

“You just don’t have the right edge to your voice when you do it. Are you sure you had his thought patterns implanted?” Misaka Worst said as she cackled. “Anyway, it seems Gremlin is an ideological criminal group.”

“So they’re overly sensitive?”

“Yes, and that’s what Misaka would try to take advantage of if Misaka had to.”

As the two girls continued their conversation, they heard an electronic tone.

Afterwards, a woman’s voice gave an announcement in fluent English.

Hamazura looked up.

“Is there a lost child or something?”

“It’s something a hell of a lot more dangerous than that,” spat out Kuroyoru. “It’s begun.”

Part 4

(November 10th – Oahu – New Honolulu International Airport Terminal Three – Cafe Simple Coconut – From the camera in a pet robot in the café.)

The first to notice the oddity was Accelerator, who put his coffee cup down on the table.

“So you’ve figured it out?” asked Birdway, while having not finished her sweet drink. “At first, it just sounds like an announcement telling you not to dirty your shoes on the newly waxed floors. But there is no reason to announce that over here, since the area they mentioned is 3 blocks away. That was an anti-terrorism warning. They want people to stay clear of that area, while also reducing secondary damages from a panic.”

“They couldn’t pull that off if some idiot was shooting up the place, so they must have found a *conspicuous suitcase* or something.”

“Yes, something like that.” Birdway sipped at her too-sweet drink. “But it was not necessarily Gremlin that left the suitcase there.”

For an instant, Accelerator thought she was suggesting that it might be some other terror group, but he immediately corrected himself.

There was another possibility as to what she meant.

"…You…"

"I'll ask again: so you've figured it out?"

"Since finding Gremlin amid all these people would be difficult, you *set something up on our end*!?"

"It's merely a matter of efficiency." Birdway was still completely relaxed. "If we do nothing, Gremlin will do something. That will cause a great number of people to suffer. As such, we need to draw them out beforehand. Whether they use methods that your common sense will help you comprehend or not, Gremlin is an ideological terror group. That means…"

"They can be overly sensitive when it comes to their ideology," finished Accelerator as he became profoundly aware of the electrode on his neck.

The men in black suits must have been the ones who had actually set up the suitcase.

"If that's what they're like, we can really get to them. If they know someone else is going to use their name in a copycat attack, they'll try to stop it even if it puts them at the disadvantage…"

"Gremlin is going to do something here in Hawaii," Birdway said with a grin. "But that doesn't mean we have to wait for them to attack first, does it?"

The current commotion had a high probability of drawing out someone from Gremlin.

If they could capture that person, they had a chance of finding Gremlin's hideout or learning of their plan.

It was true that, as a mere "matter of efficiency" as Birdway had put it, that was the best method.

However…

"I have one question."

"And what would that be?"

"What is inside the suitcase you're using as a dummy?"

Birdway shrugged and said, "*Reality always works best*. If the police aren't panicking, Gremlin might get suspicious before they interfere."

Accelerator felt that he had truly grown, since he did not break the table in half.

Part 5

(November 10th – Oahu – New Honolulu International Airport Central Lobby – From security camera footage.)

Kamijou and Mikoto had looked for souvenirs in the duty-free shops before even taking a step outside the airport, but Kamijou suddenly made a strange sound and ran off after reading an email on his cell phone. He must not have known the dangers that a major gun-toting country could hold.

“Gyaaaaaaahhh!? Th-this goes well beyond misfortune!!”

“Wait, wait! Are you really going to cut across here!? The announcement about the waxing was a hidden anti-terrorism warning!!”

“I just got an email saying Birdway set up a bomb!!”

Of course, no one would go out of their way to approach an area being odorously waxed by a lawnmower-like device. If one thought about it calmly, it was strange how airport workers were watching alertly from the outer edge of the area being waxed, but the people who had believed the announcement did not seem to sense any danger.

The warning signs and the foul odor were enough for most of the people to naturally distance themselves from the area.

Meanwhile, Kamijou unhesitatingly charged straight into the area covered in half-dried wax.

Mikoto grimaced at the smell and looked down at the clothes she was wearing, but continued on after seeming to have given up on something.

The workers on the outer edge of the area frantically tried to stop them, but the two ignored their shouts.

As he ran on ahead, the boy said, “Honestly, I can’t tell who the real terrorists are here. …Am I supposed to stop Gremlin or do something about this suitcase?”

“Is that the suitcase you mean?”

A number of men were surrounding a large suitcase. They seemed to be airport security, so the police must not have arrived yet.

Instead of heading straight for the suitcase, Kamijou hid behind a nearby pillar.

Mikoto followed him.

“Is Gremlin the group behind all this? Do you think they’re mixed in with those men?”

“…I’m not so immersed in that side of things to know if someone’s a magician just by looking at them.”

Kamijou glanced around and spotted Hamazura and Misaka Worst peering from behind a corner about 70 meters away.

He took that to mean Accelerator was probably close by as well.

Kamijou pulled out his cell phone and moved his thumb across its keys.

“Who are you calling?”

“Birdway.”

After the phone rang a few times, she answered.

“I’ve found the suitcase you set up. There are some people who look like airport security around it. Do you really think Gremlin will show up?”

“*They already have*.”

“?”

Kamijou frowned and Birdway continued.

“They’re having unexpected troubles on their end, too. They’re trying to make it past the guards using a makeshift spell, but analyzing and dispelling it is easy enough.”

“…Are they altering their appearance? Is someone from Gremlin mixed in with those workers…?”

“Not there.”

He heard a sound over the phone, as if she had clapped her hands together.

Immediately afterwards, Kamijou felt a chill as around 20 figures appeared out of thin air.

They were all Western men. They wore the formal dress clothes of Birdway's subordinates.

"We are not the main dish," said the man in the center, Mark Space, before he pointed toward an area with nothing in it.

"*She is the one you need to focus on.*"

"!?"

Nothing had been there just a moment before, and there was nothing there to hide behind, and yet a girl now stood there.

She had blonde hair and white skin. The lines of her body were slender and beautiful, and she had a well-featured face. She looked less like a natural person and more like an ideal girl from a picture book. If you were to describe her, she looked like a princess, though it was mainly her clothing that accomplished that impression.

She wore an odd dress that seemed to be made of countless thin membranes placed one on top of another. The lines of her body were clearly visible through it.

The one aspect of her that did not look straight out of a fairy tale was the figure-correcting underwear binding her entire body, like a diving suit that lay at the core of her elegant dress. It was a type of modern corset that wouldn't be surprising to see on an infomercial.

She was a magician from Gremlin.

This was no longer conjecture or a story heard from someone else. For the first time, Kamijou saw the true enemy before his eyes.

What he felt was not an obvious sense of intimidation.

If he had to put a name to it, it would be a sense of something foreign.

He had an unpleasant feeling that something there should not have existed. He felt somewhat anxious, as if overlooking her now would bring great disaster later. Fear and concern were part of a life form's reaction to danger, but what he was experiencing felt purer than that. Instead of the powerful emotion of fear causing him confusion, the raw feeling of danger forcibly honed his thoughts.

The knowledge that she was a member of the organization that had unhesitatingly tried to drop Radiosonde Castle on Academy City gave rise to a sense of rational hatred within him.

"(…Did Birdway forcibly dispel all invisibility spells in the area or something?)"

The area of effect had likely been the entire central lobby.

That was why the men in black suits, who had set up the suitcase, had appeared along with the magician from Gremlin.

The Gremlin magician looked down at her hands and feet as if to check whether she could be seen by others.

However, she did not seem panicked at all.

"Old lady of the pumpkin carriage," she said in French, as if singing. Her pure voice sounded like that of a fairy tale princess. "Please give me the test of the glass slippers. Please give me the strict and cruel test of the glass slippers that dropped my selfish and dishonest mother and sisters to the bottom of the pit of despair."

Immediately afterwards, a supernatural phenomenon occurred.

Part 6

(November 10th – Oahu – New Honolulu International Airport – From the security camera in a vending machine.)

Hamazura's eyes opened wide as he peered around the corner.

The first thing he noticed was an unpleasant noise, like cracks running through glass.

"What's with them…?" asked Kuroyoru in a wondering tone, while being held by the nape of the neck by an electricity-type esper who was looking for an opening.

It had happened just after the twenty or so men in black suits had charged at the girl in the dress while ignoring the airport workers, who were overcome with surprise at their sudden appearance.

Every single one of the men tripped and fell to the floor that was wet with wax. It was as if they had run across an invisible wire or some other kind of trap.

That was how it appeared to be, but that was not what had truly occurred.

Hamazura heard a few groans, and then the men let out an even greater cries of pain. They were all grabbing at their leather shoes. To be specific, they were holding the end of their shoes with both hands.

It was as if every single one had suddenly had all of their toes snapped.

It was as if everyone's feet had been broken within the range of some invisible explosion emitted from the girl in the dress.

Hamazura let out a voice of confusion.

"What the hell is going on?"

"Shh. She's muttering something in French."

The girl in the dress standing alone in the center of all the collapsed men was indeed muttering something.

"…Old lady of the pumpkin carriage. Please lend your power to pitiful Cendrillon. Give me the test of the glass slippers once more. Do so until all the arrogantly deceitful challengers hang their heads in shame."

"Cinderella, hm? Is she a self-suggestion-type Gemstone?"

Misaka Worst rationalized what she was seeing like that, but Hamazura felt something was off.

He did not detect the distinct scent of Academy City's espers, and yet what he was seeing seemed to be following set rules.

That girl was a magician.

She was from Gremlin.

The girl who had named herself Cendrillon wielded the laws of a different world.

She was one of the those who had sent out Radiosonde Castle for their own personal objective.

Hamazura's breath caught in his throat.

"What should we do?" Misaka Worst asked bluntly.

"I don't know what she's using, so I can't tell where the safe zone is. Without knowing that, I wouldn't suggest approaching her. …It would be best to find a way to attack her without approaching."

“Misaka can think of someone that isn’t safe to attack even from a distance…”

Part 7

(November 10th – Oahu – New Honolulu International Airport – From a joke pen camera dropped by its owner in the process of evacuating.)

Accelerator was holding onto an area of metal framework near the ceiling in the central lobby.

He was inspecting the situation.

“(…Can she target everyone standing on the same floor as her? No, that Level 0 and the #3 hiding behind the pillar over there weren’t affected. It must simply be the distance from her.)”

If you displayed their locations on a two dimensional map of the floor, Accelerator was closer to Cendrillon than Kamijou and Mikoto, but the central lobby was tall. It reached up to a height of about three stories, so he was farther away from her in three dimensional space.

With just one piece of magic, Cendrillon had sent an attack out in every direction which had immediately turned the situation in her favor.

All of the men in black suits were holding their feet and writhing about.

Accelerator could not see what had actually happened to them, but Cendrillon herself opened her mouth and explained.

“Warning.”

She was speaking toward Kamijou, but the boy did not seem to understand her as she was speaking French.

“This spell allows only my foot size, 22.5 cm. If your feet are smaller, the areas between the bones are forcibly widened and if your feet are larger, your toes are severed.”

“…”

A vivid image of what had happened to the men entered Accelerator’s mind.

“However, that was only a warning. That one only dislocated the toes. The real thing is next. So what will you do? Will you leave Gremlin alone, or must I take some collateral that is a little more certain?”

Kamijou’s face finally paled once the #3 translated for him.

The “collateral” she referred to was likely the toes of everyone who opposed Gremlin.

“(…The main question is on what conditions the glass slippers activate.)”

Accelerator tried to come up with some means of fighting back.

“(If there’s something that moves along the floor and explosively spreads out, I just have to destroy that. But I’m up against a magician here. If it’s something like a cursed straw doll and it simply attacks anywhere there are feet while ignoring the concepts of distance and vectors, I could be in trouble.)”

Not too long before, he would have mocked that kind of thinking. But now, it was no laughing matter.

There was no guarantee that his vector transformation that altered definite values would work on that mysterious attack.

Part 8

(November 10th – Oahu – New Honolulu International Airport 3rd Runway – From a wild bird surveillance camera for bird strike prevention.)

The gray runways spread out like packing tape placed over a lawn. A girl of about twelve walked along one of the countless asphalt lines cutting across. That was, of course, an area where normal people were not allowed.

She was speaking with someone over her cell phone.

“Right, right. Well, that won’t work. You just pretend you didn’t understand her French and try to stall for time. That was all those idiots were there for anyway. I never expected them to win. Just put on an act so it looks like you and that middle school girl who’s translating are too worked up for her to get her meaning across. …I am a bit disappointed that they were taken out in a single strike though.”

As she spoke, the girl headed for one end of the runway.

She was not headed for a large passenger plane.

“I already told you, it won’t work. …What? Hamazura and the others have started firing at her with a compressed gas gun they made from a fire extinguisher? That won’t work either. She’ll probably just avoid the shots with monstrous speed. She’s transformed the story of Cinderella into an attack spell by overwriting religious motifs into it. In the fairy tale, an amateur girl was given the *dancing skills* required to win the admiration of a prince who was used to balls. She’d probably casually avoid a cluster bomb if you dropped it near her.”

It had looked like an easily walkable distance from within the terminal, but Birdway was realizing that the scale of the runway was much greater when you were actually walking across it.

She was getting sick of walking.

“It was probably originally created as a countermeasure for your Imagine Breaker. Foot crushing and high speed battling… it’s almost too obvious. They confirmed your survival the other day using Radiosonde Castle, so Gremlin now sees you as their natural enemy. Your right fist is a powerful trump card, but it’s pointless if you can’t hit them. Having enough speed to dodge a bullet is a so-so countermeasure.”

Birdway finally stopped walking.

“That’s right, so buy some time. Don’t think you can defeat her. If you charge in, she’ll counter you. She’ll either take your toes or shatter your cheekbone with a straight right that has all her weight behind it. I doubt you want to experience either one.”

Birdway looked up at what was stopped at one end of the airport.

What she saw was…

“I started this game, and I have an idea as to how I’m going to end it.”

Part 9

(November 10th – Oahu – New Honolulu International Airport Central Lobby – From surveillance camera footage.)

Low sounds like the beating of a drum intermittently reached Kamijou’s ears.

Shots were being fired at approximately five to ten second intervals.

The noises were coming from Hamazura and the others, who were around the corner of a passageway. They were firing an improvised gas gun at Cendrillon. To create the gas gun, they had tied four large fire extinguishers together in a bundle and attached a steel pipe to the end of the four hoses. Inside the pipe, they put corks with nails sticking through them. Those projectiles were sent slicing through the air at 230 kph, so a direct hit could drive the end of the nail into an arm or leg bone and shatter the bone like glass. They were using the weapon like a disposable bazooka.

And yet…

"I thank you, old lady."

Cendrillon's pure singing voice continued on.

Not a single shot hit her.

"I thank you for this lovely dance with the prince. I thank you for the glittering dress and glass slippers. These lovely clothes have turned this timid girl into an elegant and perfect princess for a night."

The sound of her high heels on the floor was like a sewing machine.

Her eyes met Kamijou's.

However, that was not all she was doing. Cendrillon was approaching Kamijou in great flowing motions as she avoided the projectiles.

The situation had changed.

During the discussion, the situation had become one where he could no longer attempt to buy time.

"Kh!!"

He immediately held up his right fist, but he simply did not have enough time.

Her slender arms wrapped around Kamijou's right arm and she stuck one high heel between his legs. Kamijou reflexively moved in order to avoid great pain. His body spun around as if he were the lead in a ballroom dance.

In so doing, he moved himself in between Cendrillon and Hamazura.

"Old lady of the pumpkin carriage."

Cendrillon thrust one arm under Kamijou's arm and held her open palm out toward Hamazura who had frozen in shock.

"Please send the carriage quickly. Send it before I wake… before I wake from this one-night dream. Please send the pumpkin carriage."

A shockwave roared across the room.

It was as if an invisible vehicle had driven through. Sensing danger from the line of destruction that ran across the floor, Hamazura and the others frantically headed back around the corner. The instant they did, the wall next to the corner was smashed to pieces.

"Why you…!!"

From her position near Cendrillon, sparks flew from Mikoto's bangs.

However, Cendrillon tightened her grip on Kamijou's arm, swung him around, and used him as a shield once more. Mikoto's natural ability was sealed by that shield.

"Old lady of the pumpkin carriage."

She swept Kamijou's legs out from under him and he fell to the ground, taking Mikoto with him.

Cendrillon's lovely singing voice was the only thing left resounding through the central lobby as she leaned over.

She was preparing her foot-crushing attack.

She was going to create a new explosion using magic.

"Please give me the glass slippers. The distance is 500. The number of people is unlimited. Please give me the strict and cruel test of the glass slippers that leaves all the dishonest liars hanging their heads."

"That same spell…!?"

As Kamijou lay on his back, he saw Accelerator holding onto a metal framework near the ceiling.

"(…She's noticed he's hiding there!! That's why she set it to such a wide range…!)"

There was no guarantee that Accelerator's reflection would work against her.

It was an unknown number.

And Kamijou's own situation was hopeless as he had no obvious defense other than his right hand.

They had been naïve.

Kamijou and his group had not been the only ones trying to draw out the enemy. Cendrillon had noticed the trap and had charged straight into it in order to eliminate all of the dangerous elements at once.

That seemed to be how it would end, but…

"You're still in the central lobby, right?" asked Birdway's voice.

Kamijou looked around for the source of the voice and spotted his cell phone lying on the ground nearby.

"Stay away! You need to fall back and wait for another opportunity to-!!"

"That's all I need to know," she said, cutting him off.

Immediately afterwards, the window covering one wall shattered.

The window was over three stories tall and over 300 meters across, but the entire area of reinforced glass shattered all at once.

The cause was clear.

A giant tanker truck filled with fifty tons of airplane fuel had smashed through the window and into the central lobby at full speed.

Birdway was aboard it.

However, she was not in the driver's seat. She was standing on its roof in a daunting pose.

Birdway must have been using some kind of spell because not a single shard of the glass she had shattered touched her.

"Hah…?"

Still sitting atop Kamijou and Mikoto, Cendrillon cocked her head to the side and stiffened.

Birdway ignored her and spoke into her cell phone.

“Hold down her legs.”

Kamijou stretched out his arm like a drowning man reaching for something to grab onto.

In doing so, he managed to slow Cendrillon’s movements by a few seconds.

That was more than enough to decide things.

It was a direct hit.

A great roar soared right past Kamijou’s face as he lay on his back. The ground clearance for large American vehicles like that was quite high, so Kamijou and Mikoto managed to remain below the vehicle while Cendrillon who was sitting atop them was hit by the front of the truck.

“Gh-gh-gah…!?”

Cendrillon tried to shout something, but the tanker truck moving at nearly 200 kph did not give her the opportunity.

The truck continued on and slammed into the wall of the central lobby.

The record for the loudest noise in the battle was broken again and again. This new sound deafened Kamijou’s ears. A large crack ran through the wall, fragments flew through the air, and something like dust billowed up. The driver’s compartment of the tanker truck was crushed in like an empty can.

Given the state of the truck, Birdway should not have gotten off lightly from her position on its roof, but for some reason she was perfectly fine. She landed lightly on the floor of the central lobby.

“There,” said the young girl as she played with her hair. “Honestly, I can’t believe all of you let yourselves collapse all over the place so easily. It was a little tricky working the wheels through the gaps between you.”

“Y-you monster…” said Kamijou in a trembling voice as he sat up.

Cendrillon’s spell must have been forcibly dispelled because the men ceased groaning and shouting.

“I thought we needed that Cendrillon girl to find Gremlin’s hideout and learn about their plan!? Wasn’t that a little much!? This is well beyond needing to call an ambulance!”

“Not necessarily,” said Birdway as she lightly waved her right hand. At some point a wand had appeared there. “See? It looks like we can’t deal with Gremlin using ordinary means.”

“?”

Kamijou was about to let out a puzzled voice, but then he heard a creaking noise.

It sounded like a metal sheet being bent. The noise was joined by other similar noises and they grew slowly but surely louder and more frequent.

Between the tanker truck’s smashed driver’s compartment and the smashed wall, something was moving and breaking the metal panels in a way that made them seem weaker than paper.

It was a finger.

A slender, feminine finger was sticking out.

The sight was similar to someone sticking their hand in the closing door of a train or elevator and forcing it back open.

“Cen… drillon…!?”

“Of course. Cinderella was a flawless princess in front of the prince. A mistake would be unthinkable. All the external factors are readjusted so that it remains that way. I guess that convenient ‘winner’s aura’ is the ball. It seems something that is nothing more than a large mass will not be enough to put an end to her aspirations.”

A clear gap appeared between the tanker truck and the wall.

Eyes covered in blood peered from within.

“However,” said Birdway as she spun her wand around in front of her. “Cinderella’s dress has a limit to its functionality. Specifically, a time limit of midnight. The changing of the date has meaning, but if you take it to refer to the ending of a one-night dream, there is a simpler symbol that can be used. Namely…”

As Birdway spoke, she stopped spinning her wand around.

It was pointing toward the tanker truck.

At some point, a gold pocket watch with a narrow chain had been coiled around the wand.

Where its hands pointed does not need to be said.

However, it further reinforced the symbol and role she was using.

“Dawn.”

Immediately afterwards, the fifty tons of airplane fuel ignited and intense heat and light filled the central lobby.

While it was better than having it sprayed into the air and vaporized, airplane fuel still had very different characteristics to gasoline.

Kamijou immediately grabbed Mikoto and hid behind the nearby pillar.

Mikoto blushed, but she still managed to hold out her right hand and used magnetism to create a wall of steel objects that protected the dumbfounded airport workers. The men in black suits knew much better than Kamijou and the others just what kind of person Birdway was, so they had already fled the area at full speed.

Kamijou did not have time to check what Accelerator and Hamazura Shiage did.

The fuel exploded and all his senses were blotted out.

Even as an intense flash of light filled the entire central lobby, Kamijou had no idea if he was doing all he could to protect himself.

His vision did not start returning until about thirty seconds later.

It took him another ten seconds before he realized that proved that he was still alive.

He saw flames.

He also saw a girl spinning a wand in one hand while standing amid a sea of unnatural flames that were more white than crimson.

She stuck her other hand into the remains of the tanker truck and pulled something out.

That something was Cendrillon’s battered form. Birdway was holding her by her blonde hair. Parts of her dress had melted and she had burns on her skin, but it was still strange for her to be in one piece after being that close to an explosion like that.

Leivinia Birdway stood alone amid the flames, holding her target by the hair.

“That settles the opening battle,” she said, sounding bored.

Part 10

(November 10th – Oahu – From an ATM security camera.)

As smoke rose from the airport, Hamazura Shiage caught his breath while leaning up against the pole of a road sign out front. He had fled from the airport. Luckily, the explosion had led to around 20,000 passengers and workers evacuating outside, so no one found him suspicious. He may have been saved by the image people had of the Japanese being so peaceful that they did not know how to do deal with danger when they came across it.

The men in black suits he saw here and there must have been the subordinates of the girl who had caused the explosion.

They too were splitting up and escaping, but unlike Hamazura, they were unbelievably skilled at intentionally mixing in with the crowds even in a situation like that.

“Shit, shit!! I thought we were fighting terrorists here, not becoming them! Some people probably got caught up in that!! And the suitcase was blown up in it too, wasn’t it!?”

“You certainly are quick to give your unofficial report of what happened. Anyway, I sense a darkness in that girl that’s different from my own,” said Kuroyoru Umidori as she turned back to face the airport. “How far do you intend to run?”

“Only as far as the cops won’t find suspicious,” said Hamazura as he breathed heavily. “We’ve only just made it past the first barrier. Gremlin hasn’t even made their real move yet, and we certainly don’t want any difficulties with the cops before we’ve stopped them. In fact, they’re the ones that the cops should be after.”

“I see you make excuses to yourself as excessively as you reward yourself.”

Hamazura ignored Kuroyoru’s scorn and wiped sweat from his face.

“Anyway, Birdway will call us once she gets some information out of that Cendrillon girl. It would be best if we hid somewhere until then.”

“Oh, is that so? By the way…”

“What?”

“…I haven’t seen Misaka Worst for a while now. If she got separated from us in the confusion, then this just got quite interesting, don’t you think? Especially in regards to my glorious return.”

“Kyaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaahhhhh!!”

Just after Hamazura let out that girly scream while in a Munch-esque pose, someone speaking Japanese chimed in from the side.

“…Why are you two messing around out here?”

It was the spiky-haired Kamijou Touma.

Part 11

(November 10th – Oahu – From a tourist’s cell phone camera.)

“Why did things end up like this…?” muttered Misaka Mikoto as she brushed up her bangs.

Standing next to her was Misaka Worst, an ao dai-wearing girl who had almost the exact same face and build as Mikoto except for the mischievous look in her eyes (and her breast size).

They had both gotten separated from their groups in the confusion and had run into each other while trying to find the others.

“Misaka is fresh from the Third Season project, so she doesn’t know very many people. When she’s not with him, about ninety percent of her desire to fight disappears.”

“Third…Season…?”

“Don’t look at Misaka like that. The project was frozen anyway. All as a secret to you, onee-tama.”

“?”

“It basically comes down to the fact that there are a surprising number of heroes scattered around this world,” muttered Misaka Worst. “Anyway, #3, are you sure you should be doing that during such an urgent time?”

“What are you trying to say?”

Mikoto had called up a map on her cell phone in order to think up a way to regroup with the other members, but…

“That sure is a lot of unrelated locations you have marked on your cell phone map there. What’s this? You have the head store of Cupid Arrow marked?”

“Fwoh!?”

Mikoto turned her cell phone off as quickly as humanly possible, but Misaka Worst’s grinning did not stop.

“Isn’t that a store well known for its wedding rings? Although Misaka had heard they had recently started expanding the breadth of their operations because business was poor…”

“…For someone born so recently, you sure are knowledgeable about this.”

“You can quickly find almost any information you want on the internet. But Misaka thought they had an external detective agency perform a background check on the customer before they would make an engagement ring or wedding ring for them. Misaka doesn’t think they would accept an order from a middle school girl.”

“Ugh…”

“Which means… heh heh… it must be that new service of theirs…ha ha… Those tag rings for lovers in a less serious relationship… hee hee…”

“Daahhhh!! Fine, you’re right! When I heard we were going to Hawaii, I just thought I could stop by and buy Cupid Arrow tag rings when I had some time!! Is that so wrong!?”

“…Those rings are made of titanium. They’re cheap but don’t you think they’re a little unrefined?”

“Titanium can be colored using electrolysis when it’s in a solution. If two rings are manufactured with the same equipment, the pattern of the coloration comes out so the two rings connect. …It’s unscientifically seen as a charm to prevent the other from cheating on you.”

“So you were going to color them using a combination of the store’s equipment and your own biri biri-ness? …Sorry, but that’s the same as putting one of your own hairs in a guy’s Valentine’s chocolate. The girl’s the only one who finds it romantic.”

“Eh!?”

“Not to mention that the two of you aren’t even going out yet. Do you have any idea how a guy must feel if the *girl* gives *him* a ring? He’d probably also want to know how you know his ring size.”

Mikoto stiffened and Misaka Worst sighed.

The girl who was less than a year old felt sorry for Mikoto and decided to stop poking fun at her over that.

“Well, enough with the Cupid Arrow tag rings. More importantly, Misaka knew that you didn’t look any different from the clones of the old project, but…”

“Wh-what?”

“What’s the point of an original if she loses to the clone in so many ways?”

“…Are you talking about breast size…?”

Sparks flew from the fourteen-year-old’s bangs as she cocked her head to the side slightly.

Paying the sparks no heed, Misaka Worst said, “Oh, Misaka never said that. Maybe she was talking about number of appearances.”

“Now you’ve said it!!”

Part 12

(November 10th – Oahu – New Honolulu International Airport Terminal Three Storage Area – From security camera footage.)

“So you’re the only one that didn’t run away,” Birdway said bluntly.

Accelerator clicked his tongue.

She gave a light jab with her foot to what was lying on the ground in front of her.

It was Cendrillon.

The semi-transparent dress that could be seen as her symbol had been taken from her. She was now in only her underwear. While that sounded erotic, in Cendrillon’s case, it was the figure-correcting underwear that looked like a diving suit. The synthetic fiber covered her from her collarbones down to her knees, so she could likely have walked straight past a policeman without suspicion if she was holding a surfboard.

“Was that for revenge?” Accelerator asked.

“Stripping someone of the same sex is no fun,” Birdway replied. “She created a single piece of magic by combining her own body and that dress. Instead of just holding a wand or something, she was using her own body as a portion of a spiritual item. In other words, she cannot use that spell once her clothes are removed. What I don’t know is if she just wanted to be that soaked in magic or if she wanted an obvious safety feature out of fear of the latent potential of her own spell. Now then…”

Cendrillon already had a few injuries. They were not due to torture. They were burns she had received in the airplane fuel explosion.

Accelerator narrowed his eyes slightly.

“Do you think she’ll talk?”

“Why else would I go through all the trouble of getting her to talk?” replied Birdway as she placed a number of charms made of parchment on Cendrillon’s face.

Either due to the damage from the burns or due to having been turned back into “a mere girl” from losing her dress, Cendrillon was clearly unable to resist. She merely writhed weakly on the ground.

“*Deny*,” Birdway said with a grin. “No matter what you try to deny, I can read it from here. So you only need to resist my questions with all your might.”

If the girl responded truthfully, that was that and if she desperately tried to resist, that would act as a sign.

The only possible escape would have been complete apathy, but it was difficult to give absolutely no reaction while being questioned when the state of your mind mattered as well. And when violence was involved, it became all the more difficult. Reacting defensively to avoid pain was only natural and humans received much more information from others’ words than they realize.

Cendrillon slowly shook her head.

Birdway ignored her and asked, “*Where are your comrades*?”

Cendrillon seemed to be trying to keep the muscles in her face from moving, but her cheek started twitching slightly.

“*What is your goal*?”

One of the charms started glowing.

Birdway had intentionally driven Cendrillon to resist and the location of that barrier over her heart could be used to expose the location of what she was trying to protect.

She had no way to resist it.

This was not a puzzle or video game that was made so that it could be won. The player's skill did not matter when she was trapped within a professional's net that had no escape.

"The calculations are going well. In another 30 seconds, I'll have some good news for you," said Birdway lightly.

"Oh, oh. Cendrillon-chan, you certainly were utterly and obviously defeated."

A new voice came from Cendrillon's own mouth.

"…"

Immediately afterwards, Birdway mercilessly jammed the end of her wand into Cendrillon's mouth. The unpleasant noise of her front teeth breaking could be heard and dark red blood spilled from her open lips. Despite this, Cendrillon was smiling….or rather, made to smile.

"There's no point in trying to subdue her. After all, I don't mind if you break all her limbs. I can control her like a marionette, so I can force her past her—ha ha—human limits."

The sound of something cracking could be heard.

It was the sound of Cendrillon biting through Birdway's spiritual item. However, her front teeth had already broken. Doing that with nothing more than the pure strength of one's jaw would be bad enough, but she was doing it with only partial fragments of her broken teeth remaining. The pain must have been unimaginable.

Accelerator flipped the switch on his choker and kicked rubble at her at blinding speed. She easily avoided the projectiles and jumped over five meters back. Only then did she speak to the one who was controlling her.

"…I was waiting for you."

"Yes, yes. From the lack of your dress, I take it your fairy tale spell was destroyed. I will be activating my spell through you, so it would be a lot of help if you would use the magical release key to temporarily give me complete control of your body."

"Tch!!" Birdway clicked her tongue and spun around the remains of her wand. At some point, it turned into a small cup.

However, Cendrillon chanted some kind of spell before Birdway could activate an attack spell.

"…Total control on Red 25…"

"There we go. The result is Black 11. Authorization complete."

A dry sound burst from within Cendrillon's body. The color of her eyes clearly changed. Traces of someone other than herself could be seen there.

And…

"Okay, Cendrillon-chan. Time to truly protect Gremlin's information."

Cendrillon grinned.

She then pulled a sharp piece of the wand from her mouth and forcefully stabbed the end into her own temple.

"Eh…?" said a voice.

The voice came from Cendrillon's mouth.

With a shocked look on her face, she collapsed to the side. Her reaction was simply too little. She did not brace herself at all as she landed. Her arms, legs, and hair were sprawled out and her red blood spread out in a pool.

That was all.

No more words came from her mouth. Not from Cendrillon and not from the person controlling her.

"Damn. I doubt that made it through her skull, but a fragment of bone must have stabbed into her brain. It must have caused a subarachnoid hemorrhage. I see. This will indeed make getting information more difficult."

"…"

"Don't look at me like that. I'm merciful enough to call an ambulance for her."

"What do we do now? I thought she was our last hope."

"Oh, we still caught a fish," said Birdway, sounding bored and looking around. "Gremlin contacted us to silence her. Now we just have to reel them in."

CHAPTER 2

The Trigger.

Natural_Bomb.

Part 1

(November 10th – Oahu – Hotel Firefly 49th Floor – From a camera recording the proceedings.)

They were within a hotel room that was far from being the nicest in Oahu. They knew of other high class hotels suited for VIPs and facilities with suites that normal people did not even know existed, but those places could possibly have been marked by dangerous elements.

“Why are you still running that thing?”

That displeased voice belonged to a woman named Roseline Krackhart. She was the president’s aide. She was in her early thirties and had an atmosphere that made her seem extremely well suited to being a tutor (in more ways than one). However, she had once broken a reporter’s nose on national television when he had asked her about the veracity of rumors saying she “knew every inch of Mr. Scandal’s body”. Fortunately, this had given her the image of a guardian who would protect any potential victims of sexual harassment, so the president’s approval rating improved due to the incident.

Her general behavior was also evident in how well her suit that was custom-made by a supporting menswear company suited her.

“It is my duty to record all conversations while we are on the job,” replied a secretary holding a video camera.

“I see. Thanks.”

Roseline lay down across a three-person couch and grabbed a business magazine. The featured article was about the 100 most important people who kept America running. She glanced through articles on Flack Kateman the car king, Olay Blueshake the media queen, Douglas Hardbell the rock star, and others before narrowing her eyes.

"…The president's name not being on the list of people who keep America running is indeed a problem."

"Ma'am, how about we get down to the main issue at hand?"

"I always end up putting off things that I know are just going to depress me."

Roseline tossed aside the business magazine while sprawled out on the couch.

She then looked over toward one wall.

"General, have you found the president?"

"N-no, but we are currently searching for him with everything we have."

"It's that hard even for the Marines?"

"He abandoned his GPS in a garbage can near the press conference building. For some reason it was inside a contraceptive with the end tied shut. Our code breaking team says it may have been some kind of message…"

"That was just his idea of a joke."

Roseline put her hand to her forehead.

She was irritated, but it was not due to direct anger at being toyed with.

"That idiot. A condom? If the Christian groups find out the president was carrying one of those around, we'll never hear the end of it."

"Wh-what about the secret service? We are of course doing everything we can, but the cooperation of specialists like them is essential."

"General, you are the Commandant of the Marine Corps. You can complain about a lack of man-power all you want, but we cannot have you fearing the possibility of having all responsibility fall in your lap in an unforeseen situation like this. I believe we already explained to you why we went beyond the normal boundaries and asked for your help."

Roseline reached for a wine bottle on the table but grabbed some mint gum once she remembered the camera was running.

"*They are suspicious*."

"…"

Her voice had been quiet, but her words had held great meaning.

The general naturally fell silent.

“We know something is happening, but that is all we know,” Roseline continued. “We cannot figure out what exactly that something is. This is not simple bribery or coercion. Merely using a blacklist to quarantine it is not enough. They are suddenly becoming enemies of the United States as if they are being possessed by a demon.”

If the hostile elements were simply spreading out from a single person behind it all, they could possibly stop the spread by quarantining every single hostile element. However, when the person behind it was like an invisible demon that chose other people to control, the quarantine method lost all meaning. If they could not stop this person behind it, they could not guarantee their fundamental safety.

It was unclear by what means the people were being controlled.

Roseline and the others had surmised that there was a certain type of person that was more easily controlled and they were maintaining their safety by distancing themselves from anyone who showed the slightest evidence of being controlled. However, they were unsure how long that would suffice.

“As for the Senate and the House…well, about half of them seem *suspicious*. It seems to be spreading below the surface. And the military is no exception, general.”

“I-I had been told, but it simply does not seem real…”

“I know what you mean. I have seen it with my own eyes, yet I still can’t believe it. However, the fact remains that it is happening. Fortunately, the only confirmed victims so far are American officials. That is why you and the few units you accompanied in the joint operation cleaning up after the war with the Australian military did not run into any difficulties.”

Roseline Krackhart knew relatively little of the occult. She was only aware that it *seemed somehow different* from the esper development occurring in Academy City.

The president on the run likely had a similar level of knowledge in that regard.

A few teams were working on analyzing the mysterious phenomena that had occurred during World War III, but they had yet to come up with any real results.

That was why she was only able to give vague descriptions despite having witnessed clearly abnormal occurrences in the White House.

“Th-then…”

“Yes, we are only here due to our good fortune. However, we need to investigate as to why we had that good fortune. After all, we are in a situation where it is possible *we could become possessed the instant we step outside*. In all truth, the world police are

being eaten into. I cannot guarantee that a child or old man on the street won't suddenly start firing into a crowd, much less that the government can continue to function. Everyone in this country is at risk of being a victim or an attacker. If we do not find the occult conditions behind this and stop whoever is behind the invasion, even the nuclear launch codes could fall into enemy hands."

"Is this why the president went off on his own…?"

"Probably. When that idiot learned of the situation, he started thinking about what he could do on a personal level to deal with this danger that is on a national level. He realized he would be immediately surrounded if he tried something on the mainland, so he played along until he reached an area where they had less influence. He must have thought their influence had not yet reached an island so far from the mainland. …And yet no one knows the actual rules behind this."

"Th-then…" The general wiped sweat from his brow. "Are we putting the president in even more danger by chasing after him? If he has some means of victory…"

"Do you seriously think he does?"

Roseline glared at him with piercing eyes but softened her expression after she grew overly conscious of how the man winced.

"No matter the reason and no matter how dangerous the situation, we must have continual access to the president on the center stage. If it gets out that he has disappeared, he will be deemed no longer able to perform his duties and all authority will be passed to the vice president. …Because he has *you know what*, that is unlikely to happen right away, but we still cannot relax," she said. "And *the vice president has already become suspicious*. He has done nothing wrong yet and he says he is trying to cooperate with us, but it is possible he is the type of person easily controlled by whoever is behind this. As such, handing the duties of the White House over to him is too much of a risk."

No one dared put the rest into words.

They all felt the idea of one of the world's superpowers being usurped by some unknown person was not something to say even as a joke.

"(…Well, the one piece of luck is that the president took *that* with him,)" muttered Roseline before speaking up. "Do whatever it takes to find the president. Find him before his disappearance is discovered by the vice president and the other politicians undermined by whoever is behind this."

Roseline did not even look over as the general gave a proper salute. She muttered to herself with a look of pure displeasure on her face.

"(…More importantly, going missing is not the only way he can be made unable to perform his duties. A bullet through the head would do the trick just as well.)"

Part 2

(November 10th – Oahu – Dear My Car, Oahu Branch – From an in-car camera.)

Roberto Katze, the American President, entered a rental car shop with a silver attaché case in one hand.

He spoke to the young woman at the reception counter.

"I don't care what, but just give me something cheap. Hmm, I think electric cars are supposed to have a good image. Roseline is never shutting up about it. Well, gasoline or deuterium or whatever is fine too. Just don't give me a car that was just used for sex. Even if you wipe it down with ethanol, the smell sticks around."

"You certainly have an attitude. Just who do you think you are?"

"The president! As one of the citizens supporting this nation, could you at least watch the morning news!?"

"Oh, so you're an impersonator. Can you do his 'We will save the world!' thing?"

"…Whatever. Just give me the key already."

Roberto tossed some crumpled up bills on the counter and the woman tossed the key back toward him. He walked down a line of two-person cars and looked over at an especially battered convertible.

He was about to kick the tire, but stopped himself when he realized it was made by a company that supported him. He instead opened the door.

Just as he was inserting the key, the young woman came running after him.

"Sorry, sorry. I missed part of the procedure! Mr. Impersonator, I need to input the information from your license before I can let you rent that."

"Can't I just give you my social security number?"

"It has to be your license."

"…What a pain. Maybe I should submit a bill to get that changed next chance I get," muttered Roberto as he pulled a card out of his wallet.

The woman held out a reader similar to a cell phone's wallet function.

Roberto Katze held his license up to it. The young woman nodded in satisfaction upon confirming that the device had read the information from the integrated circuit inside.

"Okay. So your name is Roberto… Roberto Katze. You live at… the White House? H-hey, wait a second!!"

"May I go now?" he asked with a grin.

"Did you go so far as to change your name!? I can't believe you found an apartment complex called 'The White House'! And it's even in Washington DC! You certainly are a dedicated impersonator!!"

"Well, why don't you just believe that until the day you die!? Waaahhhhh!!"

The president drove off with tears in his eyes. He was further made a fool of as the woman saw him off by imitating his "We will save the world!!"

After leaving the grounds of the rental car shop, Roberto drove with one hand and used the other to open the attaché case lying in the passenger seat. The case was secretly a computer. He connected the cables inside to a GPS-like device.

It was known as the Imperial Package.

It gave him president-level access to all government cloud systems. With that one device, he could send orders to any government office or prepare ballistic missiles for launch. Of course, it used various methods of ensuring that only the current president could use it.

"…This way I can check on what *the people who have become suspicious* are accessing."

Areas where the flu is spreading tend to have more people searching for information on the flu using search engines. This fact could be used to determine how far the flu had spread by checking the search records of the search engines.

Roberto was doing essentially the same thing.

However, he was checking on what he estimated the *suspicious* people were after rather than the flu.

From what he could see of the people taking *suspicious* actions, Roberto could not tell if the total number of enemies was increasing or if the enemy was merely switching over to controlling people closer and closer to their objective.

However, he had to assume that anyone that showed any *suspicious* behavior even once would once more become *suspicious* as if they were switching back and forth between good and evil.

He may not have been able to see it clearly, but it all had to be a clear attack,

The people being used as pawns all had their own individual lives.

With each person taken over, whoever was taking control of them was getting access to the information that person alone had access to. If Roberto could figure out what the person behind it was searching for, he could get a better understanding of what the enemy's true objective was.

As he used the Imperial Package to view the secret cloud, Roberto searched for areas of concentrated accesses that had nothing to do with the people's normal duties.

Roberto Katze clicked his tongue lightly.

"…So I was right. It is the trigger being stored in Oahu."

It was a top secret piece of equipment that had been developed in an American military research facility.

Depending how it was used, the special device could be used to take the lives of hundreds of thousands of people at once.

The president's grip on the steering wheel naturally tightened as he thought about how it could be used in Hawaii.

Part 3

(November 10th – Oahu – Green Café Iwamaki – From the camera in the tablet terminal installed on the table.)

A broadcast of a football game seemed to drag on forever within a café near the airport. The café specialized in Japanese tea, so the sport did not fit the atmosphere. A major broadcasting company had bought the rights to broadcast all of the team's games, so it was being broadcasted for free. The customers seemed quite excited about it. A cardboard speech bubble had been attached to the edge of the flat screen TV that said "A round of applause for Olay Blueshake the media queen!" in English.

Kamijou Touma was carefully listening to a phone call from Birdway so that he could hear over the surrounding noise. He had his cell phone on speaker phone, so Hamazura and Kuroyoru could hear as well.

Kamijou had been about to ask what would make a good souvenir for Index (it had to be food of course), but what Birdway told him made it clear it was hardly the time to be thinking about things like that.

Incidentally, Kuroyoru was cowering from Kamijou who had suddenly appeared earlier and Hamazura was trembling while looking over at Kuroyoru.

"Due to Cendrillon being taken out, I have succeeded in drawing a different Gremlin magician out from the crowd. This new one is the type of magician that controls other people. That type almost never comes out to the front stage themselves. Getting them to come out into the spotlight is the true battle when it comes to that type."

"What do we do now?"

"We go fishing," said Birdway sounding very pleased. "It would be foolish to think a magician like this can only control one person. The more people this one controls, the more her power grows, so it would be best to assume she is targeting the normal people in the area as well. The reason she leaves everything around her to others and does not stand in the path of danger is likely due to a complex over her own lack of power. She's trying to overcome that with numbers. Therefore, I need to first gather some samples. Two or three of the poor victims being controlled by Gremlin should do it. With that, I can analyze her spell. I need to know what conditions are needed for its use and what kind of line connects the user and the victim. Knowing that will allow me to find her… and make a direct magical counterattack."

"And that investigation will best be carried out without letting this magician know you're doing it, right?"

"Of course."

"What if she isn't in Hawaii?"

"I will hide even the fact that I can detect where she is. If she is outside Hawaii, it'll take some time, but we'll still be able to catch the idiot by surprise. In fact, we could even purposefully fail in our attack. Each time the idiot gets away, she will only lead us to a new hideout. During that process Gremlin will lose manpower and assets. Gremlin will likely eventually begin to suspect the idiot, but if we give the right *false hints* we can make them think she's a traitor and a spy and they'll end up taking each other out. The whole process will likely uncover the identities of other Gremlin members, so we just have to change who the target of the search is at that point."

"…You certainly play dirty."

Kamijou would get into a direct fistfight and solve things on the same day they began, so that was a completely different style of fighting than he was used to.

To be honest, he did not feel he could completely approve of the method.

However, he could not come up with an alternative method.

“What do I need to do?”

“Just stay where you are,” replied Birdway over the phone. “I have another hero. And unlike you, this one is quite skilled at working behind the scenes.”

Part 4

(November 10th – Oahu – In front of Hotel Firefly – From a tourist’s video camera.)

Only the most commonplace hotels did not have a doorman and porter standing in front of the entrance even in an area as ungodly hot as Honolulu. A set of three was created when the valet who parked guests’ cars in the underground parking garage was included.

However, services like that would require a tip and the hotel parking garages were often quite expensive. As such, cheaper parking areas were established around the hotels and it was not uncommon for people to park illegally.

In an area full of tourists coming and going, leaving one’s car out in the open was quite dangerous, but most of the tourists were not from the island and therefore usually had rental cars. By purchasing the cheap insurance beforehand, a broken window was no big deal. And no one was stupid enough to leave their valuables in the car while staying in a hotel, so there was no danger of having their possessions stolen.

Edward Torke stepped out of one such illegally parked car.

The white man was wearing a suit that—while not the nicest—was at least not mass produced. However, the heat of Hawaii had ruined his usual style. His tie was loosened and his jacket was off and draped over his arm. From the look of him, the sleeves of his shirt would likely be rolled up after another hour.

However, even as the glaring light of the sun reflected off of the hotel windows, Edward Torke did not hold his hand in front of his face or even narrow his eyes. His pupils underwent no change. The frequency of his blinking was as accurate as if it was being timed with a stopwatch.

He was not a tourist. He had come to the island for a business negotiation.

He was supposed to be speaking with a local fishing union about the safe collection of deep ocean water as the first step toward creating a foothold in the business of manufacturing and selling a health drink based on it.

They “had decided on” a room in that hotel as the location of the negotiations about the price.

He “accurately remembered” that the negotiations would take place in Room 4911.

In reality, the hotel the negotiations were to occur in had a completely different name and someone completely different was staying in the Room 4911 in question. Edward Torke had just stuffed a large contract and check into an attaché case. If he were to notice someone he did not know (named Roseline) in the room, he would conclude that she was a robber after his money.

And in the great gun nation of America, flight was not the only action people instinctively took in order to protect themselves. He had a revolver with a four inch barrel in his pants pocket.

A single piece of altered information could lead to a great chain reaction.

Edward Torke hummed a tune at the thought of the great business deal he was about to make while not suspecting that his actions were being used for someone else’s purposes.

And then the electronic billboard attached to the hotel wall fell down from directly above him.

The great crash left the surrounding people dumbfounded and finally a great uproar began. The hotel workers hesitated to leave their posts at the entrance, but once their boss exited the building, they frantically ran over to the scene of the accident.

However, they were unable to immediately move the crushed electronic billboard out of the way.

It was disconnected from its power supply, but the internal circuits and other electronic parts must still have had some electricity stored within them. A great shower of sparks kept the hotel workers from approaching.

No one was sure who had called it, but the siren of an ambulance approached.

It was not until 20 minutes later that the rescue team managed to get the electronic billboard out of the way.

And…

“What?” said one of the rescue workers in surprise.

The electronic billboard had been removed and the cracked asphalt showed just how great the shock of its impact had been.

But that was all.

Edward Torke, who had supposedly been crushed, had disappeared.

Part 5

(November 10th – Oahu – Sewer Rainwater Pipe – From a camera for monitoring water levels during a disaster.)

“This is the third one,” muttered Accelerator as he dragged the poor “victim” down through the manhole and into the sewer.

Birdway nodded in approval.

“That’s all of them. Excellent work.”

“Are you sure the person controlling them didn’t notice this?”

“Pretty sure.”

The rainwater pipe was filled with rotting mud and the like which gave it quite an odor, but Birdway did not seem to mind. Despite her appearance, she may have been fairly used to harsh environments.

“The magician controlling them most likely collects information using the five senses of the victims. She would notice if you just outright attacked the victim, but she won’t sense any danger if it looks like they were knocked out naturally.”

“How can you be so sure? How do you know this magician can’t continue moving the targets’ eyes around after they lose consciousness?”

“I can’t say for sure, but we do have a precedent.”

“A precedent?”

“Cendrillon. If she could do that, she could have continued to collect information after Cendrillon collapsed and used it to put together a plan against us.”

However, that had not happened.

“Once I analyse the spell, I can track down where this person controlling the victims is as well as detect any pawns trying to attack us while hidden in a crowd. That will be a perfect defense against the spell. Simply put, it’ll be checkmate.”

The threat of having a normal person attacking disappeared once an enemy could be detected and dealt with head on. Birdway and Accelerator were not people who feared a handgun.

“…So you couldn’t perfectly detect them up until now? So there’s a possibility I was confidently attacking completely unrelated people?”

“Don’t get so upset. In all likelihood, these were accurate. This just brings that up to a full one-hundred percent.”

The rainwater pipe had pathways for workers prepared on both sides and the three “victims” were lying on one of those dirty pathways.

“Now then… Since I now have all the necessary materials, it’s time to get started on the analysis. If you want to learn a bit about magic, you can watch.”

Part 6

(November 10th – Oahu – Smoking area within Coral Street Shopping Mall – From the camera in the magician’s cell phone.)

The strangest aspect of modern cell phones was the increase in the number of camera lenses.

They had a lens on the back of the phone for normal photography, a lens on the front for showing oneself in a video conference, and the number only went up with the addition of 3D photography and other features. At the current rate, it did not seem long before the entire phone would be covered in camera lenses like they were beads.

A girl of about 15 was flipping her cell phone back and forth between front and back. She had short blonde hair and white skin.

She wore a primarily green turtleneck and miniskirt as well as thick boots that passed above her knees. On her head, she wore something like a headband made of tree branches. Her outfit made her stand out from the building made of glass and concrete.

With an expression that showed that the clearly multi-function cell phone was just too much for her, she spoke into the precision device that she simply could not get used to.

“Yes, yes. It seems he failed. The attacker, Edward, has lost consciousness and the room on Hotel Firefly’s 49th floor is still untouched. It seems they are planning to move somewhere else due to the uproar over the electronic billboard. It looks like attacking the aide group is unrealistic after all.”

The way she spoke made it clear she was not used to speaking politely.

Her tone of voice made it clear she was giving no thought to whether she was angering the person she was speaking to or what would happen to her if she did anger whoever it was. This was because she was skilled enough to avoid any danger coming her way.

She was especially skilled at avoiding danger by using others as a shield.

“Yes, yes. I understand that. The incident at the airport was indeed bad, but the basics of the plan will fall apart if the immunity is not activated. Well, we now have an idea as to how many of them there are and how serious they are. Also, they can be used as a positive factor from here on out. In the end, it is not a problem.”

The magician was simply saying whatever she could to pacify the person she was speaking to rather than logically analyzing the situation.

“Anyway, we just have to follow the plan now. After blowing through the side-quest, we just have to work on the main quest of the trigger.”

The magician’s eyebrows then moved slightly.

She seemed to finally be showing interest in something the other person had said.

“Oh, really? I knew it. I had thought that was a little too convenient. So they are interfering.”

The magician’s tone showed that she did not particularly mind.

“Well, thanks for that. When it was just me, I denied it, saying I was over thinking things. Having proof really is important. Proof is so much better than guesses. Yes, yes. I will do something about that, too. Bye.”

She hung up, spun the phone around in her hand, and then stuck it in her pocket.

At the time, no smoking campaigns were quite popular worldwide, so there were no smokers in the smoking area. The grotesque enlarged photo of a sperm with a note about smoking reducing sperm count was probably not helping.

The magician shrugged and turned around.

A man was standing there. The large black man was wrapped in powerful muscles and seemed to have a military background.

He was one of the people she was controlling. The method of control she was using on him was a bit more complex than some of the others.

"*You're up, Mr. Secret Trick.*"

Part 7

(November 10th – Oahu – Coral Street Shopping Mall – From a security camera near the east entrance.)

"Oh, I already have all the data I need to analyze her spell," said Leivinia Birdway with complete confidence.

She was waving around a single scrap of paper. It was about the size of a small certificate of commendation, but it was thicker and had a rough surface.

"It's papyrus," Birdway explained.

Apparently, she had bought that item used as a royal burial accessory from a plant specialist.

"Now we just have to wait for her weaknesses to be exposed. The automated work should finish in about an hour. Even now, I'm receiving information bit by bit. For example, I know what kind of line connects her to her victims and from where she is controlling the victims."

Accelerator listened to her while walking through the shopping mall with his modern cane.

"Basically, she used to be with the Russian Orthodox Church."

“Russian?”

“She uses a spell based on a fairy. In her case, it is the Leshy. The Leshy is the ruler of the forest and the king of all animals that live there. Do you remember when she and Cendrillon said red something and black something when Cendrillon was giving up control?”

“What about it?”

“That was roulette. They were gambling. The Leshy loves gambling with the forest animals. The winner is of course given control of the loser.”

“…”

“In this case, the Leshy is likely viewing her surroundings as the forest and the humans who live there as the animals. I don’t know the exact conditions for that yet, but the analysis spell will reveal those conditions soon. Then it will all be over.”

“For not having finished yet, you certainly are sure of yourself.”

“I have enough to search out anyone she’s controlling. Even if she tries a surprise attack, it has essentially no chance of succeeding.”

Despite having just said that, repeated gun shots rang out.

They came from behind Birdway.

From only five meters behind her.

Part 8

(November 10th – Oahu – Beachside – From a camera along the main road to enforce the speed limit.)

A station wagon slammed into Roberto Katze’s battered convertible at high speed at almost the exact same time Birdway was attacked.

The two vehicles strayed from the road and struck one of the palm trees lining the road at even intervals. A coconut fell down and hit the president right on the head.

“Gwehh…N-nice. Now that’s about as Hawaii-esque as you can get. If I wrote that in my journal, no one would believe it actually happened.”

The side of the car was crushed in, but the station wagon had struck the passenger side. The driver’s seat was safe. He was worried about the Imperial Package for an instant, but it was meant to be used in emergencies, so it was surprisingly tough. It was not even scratched.

The president closed the attaché case, ignored the door that refused to open, and jumped out of the convertible.

Roberto Katze used a hand to motion back the panicking tourists who were approaching and then headed toward the station wagon.

“I’m not used to getting run into from the side at full speed.”

Despite the great shock of the impact, the station wagon’s windshield was not broken. And the glass was tinted. Roberto was pretty sure the station wagon was not just some random vehicle, but he still approached the driver’s side door and tried to peer through the window.

“Mister, there’s something wrong when the one who ran into me is the one to pass out.”

As if in response, the window started to lower.

And a right hand holding an automatic handgun stuck out.

“…I can still kill you. Anyone who has a gun and a finger to pull the trigger can be an assassin.”

“C’mon, stop that. War & Safety handguns are the most used in the country. It would be pretty sad if I had to be shot by a product from one of my supporting companies. They’d probably ask for their money back at my funeral because I gave their company a bad image.”

As Roberto Katze complained, he noticed something about the eyes of the man who was still leaning against the airbag.

“…Mister, *you aren’t being controlled, are you*?”

Part 9

(November 10th – Oahu – Smoking Area within Coral Street Shopping Mall – From the camera in the magician’s cell phone.)

As the magician pulled out her cell phone to check the time, she heard dry gunshots in the distance soon followed by the screams of onlookers.

“The scary thing about amateurs is how they will go through with something to the end once they are determined to do it.”

She was not speaking to herself, but she received no response.

Standing next to the magician was a black girl of about 10.

The girl was standing utterly still while using her right hand to hold the end of a flathead screwdriver up to her temple.

“It truly is frightening,” the magician whispered. “All I had to say was that I would have you tear your head apart like a frozen orange and he was ready to do it.”

Birdway had analyzed the magician’s spell.

She knew that the magician used the stories of the Leshy to control people by spreading her role as the ruler of the forest animals.

If the magician had sent one of the people she was controlling with the Leshy spell after Birdway, the traces of magic power and the spell would have been detected and eliminated before they could get close.

The people controlled by the magician’s magic could not approach Birdway.

That was a foregone conclusion.

However, there was not just one way of controlling people.

For instance, *she could control a certain daughter and order her father to do things while he maintained his true self.*

“She is quite skilled, but that in itself creates openings. Since she is determining danger by the presence of my spell, I can slip right past her defenses.”

The magician grinned.

In addition to the black girl, she had a few other children gathered in the smoking area.

Every one of them would function as a hostage to pull off that kind of secret trick when it was needed.

The magician had prepared as many disposable pawns for those tricks as she had hostages. For instance, one was targeting President Roberto Katze.

“And once he is past her defenses, it’s all over. Whether she is a magician or not, she is still a human who can be killed by a single bullet.”

The girl’s father must have wanted to make absolutely sure she was dead or a police officer had shown up and shot him to death because further gunshots rang out. However, it did not matter. When Birdway was in a completely defenseless state, the first shot was all it would take.

Part 10

(November 10 – Oahu – Coral Street Shopping Mall – From a security camera near the east entrance)

Having been struck in the back by countless bullets, Leivinia Birdway collapsed to the polished shopping mall floor. Even so, the large black man continued to fire bullet after bullet from his handgun.

The dumbfounded tourists frantically tried to flee in all directions from the centre of the incident.

Shouts and screams exploded out.

Accelerator’s eyes opened wide as he took in the developing situation.

The large black man was trembling and tears were falling from his eyes, but he did not hesitate. He tossed aside an empty magazine and put in a new one.

At that point, the #1 finally came to his senses.

He hit the switch of the electrode on his neck and the Level 5 powers that gave him his name activated. He was thinking of breaking the man’s wrist before crushing his neck when…

“Sh-shit. That was dangerously close to being my moving death scene,” said Birdway as she raised her head.

The black man fell backwards in shock and shouted something. As Accelerator kicked him in the chest, he shouted at Birdway.

“What the hell did you do!?”

“Having a body substitute just in case is one of the most basic of precautions. In fact, modern Western magic goes so far as to embarrassingly say we need to kill our old self and be reborn as our new self.”

Birdway pulled a card from her pocket. It was a tarot card from the major arcana, the Hanged Man. The card showed a man hanging upside down from a tree branch, but it had holes through it.

Meanwhile, Birdway herself had not shed a single drop of blood.

“If you use Crowley’s tarot, it is the symbol of the death of the Son of God, who himself represents an age. It was originally not a symbol of execution, but if you intentionally misinterpret it, it can be extraordinarily compatible, especially for things piercing into the body. …I wanted to make sure I had some defense against bullets before setting foot in a major gun country like this, but I didn’t want to deal with a thick, sweaty bulletproof vest,” Birdway explained. “Now then, I know you’re about to awaken to your true power due to the anger and sorrow of believing I had died, but let go of that man.”

“…Psychic powers aren’t that arbitrary.”

“Even if we push him, we won’t get any hints about who’s behind this. I already have all the information I need on the spell and he isn’t being controlled by it in the first place.”

“What?”

“This is an indirect method. To be honest, I’m pleasantly surprised. It isn’t often that I praise someone, so remember this.”

Birdway ignored Accelerator’s puzzled look and approached the large black man with long strides. The man immediately held the handgun up with both hands. It was unclear whether he had remembered what he was supposed to do or if he was merely reacting to the threat of the strange monster approaching him.

“If the magician’s specialties lie solely in the field of controlling people, then guessing at the rest is a simple matter. Most likely, she is threatening you with someone close to you who she is controlling.”

“!?”

“I am not some hot-blooded idiot, so I will not give you some annoying speech. Nor am I going to kindly discuss this with you. I am simply going to tell you the truth as bluntly as I can.”

Despite the man being able to shoot her at any moment, Birdway let out her stabbing words while striking a daunting pose.

“You lucked out this time.” She pointed at her small chest with her thumb. “But next time will be different. No matter the reason and no matter what emotions are driving you, if you pull that trigger now, I will die. The trembling of your body will change to an irreversible truth. You won’t get a third chance. People aren’t normally lucky enough to get this second one.”

With a terrible light in her eyes, the victim spoke to the attacker.

Her tone of voice made it clear she knew what it was like to cross that line.

“…Are you still willing to shoot me? Do you have the guts to go through that great shock you gave yourself once more from the beginning?”

The large black man’s trembling reached its peak.

He had likely worked hard to prepare himself on his way there. He must have repeated the justifications for what he was doing again and again, piling one atop another.

When he had done the deed but failed, the pyramid of cards had come tumbling down.

If he had rationally built it back up from the beginning—if he had mentally rearmed himself by recalling what situation his loved one was in—he may have been able to shoot Birdway once more. However, he could not balance the cards with his trembling fingers. Now that he knew the shock he had experienced when he had fired that first shot, he could no longer put a stranger’s life on the scales so easily.

A cry of desperation burst from him.

It sounded like anger at his dead end of a future and also like atonement for what he had done to Birdway.

The man’s eyes opened wide as he shouted and he stuck the barrel of his handgun into his mouth.

Accelerator and Birdway let loose kicks at the same time which knocked the handgun from his hand and knocked him unconscious.

“I went too far,” said Birdway, making a conscious effort to bring her tone of voice back to normal. “This has gotten a little trickier. I no longer have the Hanged Man.”

“It’s your own fault for being careless.”

“Not really. The magician would only have put together that plan if she knew I had analyzed her spell. So where did Gremlin learn that? My methods were perfect and there was no flaw in your retrievals. And yet…”

“…”

“This is not an enjoyable situation to be in, but we might find something enjoyable if we look further into this.”

Part 11

(November 10th – Oahu – Beachside – From a camera along the main road to enforce the speed limit)

When Roberto Katze pointed that out, the driver moved slightly while still holding out the handgun. It might have been a nod.

The attacker finally opened his mouth and said, “…And if I’m not?”

“Then they most likely have a hostage. Perhaps your lover or your child.”

“And if they do!?” shouted the attacker as he re-aimed the gun. “Whatever my situation is, the situation here remains the same! Come with me. If I capture you, I can protect my family even if it means the end of this country!!”

“…C’mon, mister. Do you really think they’ll hold up their end of the deal? These are people that threatened you right off the bat rather than showing any kind of good will, right?”

“I don’t give a fuck!! If there’s even a 1% chance, that’s enough! If I do nothing, she’ll be killed for sure!!”

“Well said.” The president grinned. “But those aren’t words you should use out of desperation. If you’re willing to believe in a 1% chance, how about you put that trust in a much better option?”

“Shut up. Shut the fuck up!! Can’t you see this gun!? All you have to do is tremble in fear and do what I tell you!! Those crazy people kidnapped my younger brother’s daughter. It’s a long story, but my dead wife risked her life to protect that girl. I can’t lose her now. In fact, if the police and you guys in the government had done your job, none of this would be happening!!”

The man's words were fuelled by resentment toward crime in general and dissatisfaction with the agencies meant to protect the peace that had not stopped it. Even though he had clearly gotten caught up in the incident, it was unlikely that he knew who the real enemy was.

However, in a way, his words pinpointed the current crisis in America.

Despite being the attacker, his were the words of a victim.

Before speaking, the president reflected on the twist of fate displayed in those words.

"Mister." The president moved slowly, completely ignoring the gun pointed at him. "I apologize for what has happened to you and the kid who is being used as a hostage. In this country, we are taught to never apologize even when there has been a murder, but I bow my head to you. However, I have more to say. What you saw is the true enemy I must fight. I cannot stop until I have crushed it. After all, I am the president of this nation. It is my job to protect the lives and freedoms of its people."

"Yeah, right… You people don't give single thought about our lives!! There's no election coming up, so you don't need to patronize me like this. I don't expect any goodwill out of you self-serving politicians!!"

The gun in his hand trembled, but Roberto Katze's expression did not change.

He put his elbows on the frame of the crashed station wagon's window and peered inside. The driver carelessly pulled back the handgun and tried to put some distance between them.

Roberto simply continued speaking.

"Let's talk about the past. Before he died, my old man used to always tell me to grow up to be a strong man. He was a drunk and he never worked, but he always had a proper light in his eyes when he would say those words."

"What does that—?"

"His words led me to want to be as strong as I could possibly be. And that's how I ended up where I am now, as the President of the United States."

Roberto Katze smiled slightly and stared the armed attacker straight in the eye.

"Now I have a question for you, mister. Do you think the strong man I wanted to be was someone who would obey inhuman orders to save his own skin? Do you think it was the kind of man who decorates himself with his position and political power but pisses himself at the sight of a handgun? Do you think my dream was to become a chicken who is so overcome with fear at the thought of a single bullet that he abandons an innocent child who has been taken hostage?"

For an instant, the attacker lost sight of reality.

He forgot that he held the gun and that he had control of the situation.

“Tell me, mister.”

He could only hear the words of President Roberto Katze.

“What do you think the kind of strong man I longed to be would do in a situation like this that angered him to the bottom of his heart?”

Part 12

(November 10th – Oahu – Government Vehicle – From the in-vehicle camera)

The small refrigerator inside the high class vehicle contained ice-cold champagne, but Roseline Krackhart did not take any. She had reached for the refrigerator door, but the gazes of the secretaries had reminded her that she was on official business. The high class vehicle had a leather sofa that stretched around the inner edges in a rectangle and an expensive looking table in the center. Roseline reached for a magazine on the table but tossed it aside when she noticed the large image of the president’s face on the cover.

One of the secretaries caught it in both hands and looked down at the page it had happened to open to.

“Is this true? It says his father died of cancer, so he is prepared to reform the medical system so that no one else need go through that pain.”

“Of course it isn’t. He’s just bragging as always. In fact, if you take everything he says at face value, his father has died over 80 times. I was thinking of throwing a party once it breaks 100.”

Part 13

(November 10th – Oahu – Beachside – From a camera along the main road to enforce the speed limit)

The attacker moved his trembling hand and lowered the gun.

The president had not actually done anything to him or taken out an even more powerful weapon.

He had only spoken.

His words had held enough power to cause the attacker's eyes to open wide and to rob him of his will to fight.

"What…?"

"I'll say it again. If you're going to bet on a 1% chance, why don't we try to save that girl from those bastards rather than just doing what they say?"

"You're lying. You're just saying whatever you can to get out of this alive."

"We have a chance." The president's words destroyed the attacker's doubts. "I already encountered them back on the mainland. There is something a bit different between you and the ones I encountered before."

The true attacker had already made it within the White House, the Senate, the House, the military, and other agencies.

"It's your eyes," said the president. "The suspicious ones…well, I'm not quite sure how to put it, but they have a look in their eyes that isn't right. That was how I noticed it. I noticed their gazes while I was putting together the basics of the Emergency Financial Protection Bill."

"Their gazes?"

"The secret service, my secondary secretary, the reporters at press conferences…even the cleaning lady. It wasn't just one or two people. They did not fall under any one profession, race, age, ideology, or religion. The only common feature was the look in their eyes. No individual person looked at me for long, but it felt like someone was watching me at all times. It gradually increased until they were the majority. The White House was overflowing with those creepy people."

The president was not familiar with the details of the occult, so he did not know if a large number of enemies had been created or if the person being controlled was swapped out depending on the situation. What he did know was that the number of people with a dangerous element was increasing.

It was highly likely that anyone who had been taken even for an instant would once more become dangerous. It did not matter if any of those people were even the type to do bad things.

"…Was it a spiritless look with no readable expression?"

“Mister, was your niece like that?”

“It looked like she was in some kind of a daze.”

Roberto Katze sighed when he heard that.

“Things got to be a pain, so I contacted some people outside the White House to investigate the situation and deal with it if necessary. However, that was how I found out the suspicious people were not just in the White House. They were hiding within the NSA and CIA and the number of people taking ‘dangerous’ actions grew each day. And they have been accessing classified information on the trigger using a government network,” the president explained. “I don’t know what kind of technology the person behind this is using, but he or she can control people. And this person can likely gather information through the eyes of the ones being controlled.”

His investigation using the Imperial Package had revealed that even missile lab researchers and nuclear submarine crew members had tried to access information on the trigger. People in special environments like that would not be able to use things like cell phones, but they had to have some means of getting any uncovered information back to the person controlling them. That led the president to believe the person was directly linked to the people’s senses rather than using some kind of communication device.

“That is where our chance lies,” said Roberto. “If you were being completely controlled, you could not hide anything from the person controlling you. However, you are different. *Since you are a normal person being controlled via a hostage, the person behind this has no way to gather information from you.* We can use this to get past this person’s defenses and possibly get in a surprise attack.”

Part 14

(November 10th – Oahu – Green Café Iwamaki – From the camera in the tablet terminal installed on the table)

“And that’s how it will pan out if all goes well.”

Kamijou listened to Birdway speak over the phone.

They too were planning to counterattack using the normal people who were forced to fight, but…

“Since that man was able to attack me so easily, the magician ordering him around must have a means of detecting our location. This might also mean that she knows when her attackers fail and, therefore, when the hostages are no longer needed. …Thanks to this possibility, the monster with me has been in a very bad mood. He really is a hero.”

“What? …Anyway, this person uses magic to control the people around her, right? So wouldn’t she have lookouts posted?”

“I would have noticed them. I can detect traces of the spell,” cut in Birdway. “And over what range do you think she has lookouts posted? How did she know I had come to the shopping mall? Or are you trying to say she has lookouts posted all across the Hawaiian Islands?”

“…Could she be using an information network other than her natural magic?”

“I would say she at least has a means that either covers all of Oahu or that can scan all of the Hawaiian Islands. It also has to be something that can slip past my magic side way of doing things…”

“A surveillance network using something other than magic…? So a science side means?”

Kamijou looked up at the corner of the building’s ceiling.

“*…Like cameras…*?”

“At any rate, we need to come up with a countermeasure.”

Birdway gave a few instructions.

Kamijou frowned.

“Will that really be okay?”

“I’m the one that wants your opinion. After all, this is more of a science side issue,” Birdway replied.

No matter what the situation was, they had no choice but to head forward.

That was how it felt to Kamijou.

“…And can we really get those people wrapped up in this?” Kamijou asked carefully. “Even if they pointed guns at us, they’re just normal people who have had hostages taken. Can they really withstand a magician battle?”

“If we are going to bring Gremlin out of hiding here, we must take out this magician that can control people. And given how easily I was attacked, it’s safe to assume they already know what we look like to a certain extent. That means our best chance is to get the help of people who are in the enemy’s blind spot,” said Birdway. “Also, the hostages will be killed if we do nothing. To keep her identity a secret, the magician who used the hostages as a threat will likely eliminate the hostages in the end. In fact, she could kill two birds with one stone by giving the hostages weapons and telling them to kill their parents.”

“God dammit,” Kamijou cursed.

As they listened over speakerphone, Hamazura’s expression grew grim and Kuroyoru Umidori simply looked bored.

“…What are we supposed to do?”

“Before the battle begins, I want you to find as many of the normal people fighting for the sake of a hostage as you can. The more people on our side, the better. Also, if we know how many such people there are, we will know how many hostages we have to save.”

“But how?” Kamijou frowned. “Unlike you, I can’t detect magic or magic power.”

“There’s no need to worry about that,” Birdway readily responded. “I was attacked. We can assume they know who is in the ‘Kamijou Party’ to a certain extent. Also, they know you are alive due to Radiosonde Castle and we have already seen a countermeasure put together especially for you. …At the very least, *we know the enemy will be closing in on you*.”

Just as a chill ran down Kamijou Touma’s back, he heard a scream.

The front door was kicked down and a large man holding a handgun entered and stared directly at him.

Kamijou jumped to the ground, bringing Kuroyoru’s small form with him. Slower to react, Hamazura frantically climbed over a 30 centimeter thick partition. The very next instant, repeated high-pitched gunshots rang out.

Part 15

(November 10th – Oahu – Smoking Area within Coral Street Shopping Mall – From the camera in the magician’s cell phone)

Ten minutes had passed since the magician had heard the gunshots.

However, she had received no calls and the poor berserkers worried about their children had not returned.

"(…Were they shot by police officers who happened to be present?)" wondered the magician.

She pulled her cell phone from her pocket and spoke while operating it with her thumb.

She spoke to the unmoving hostages.

Those four children were being controlled by the magician and each of them was at or just under the age of 10.

"Okay, everyone, listen to what I have to say," she said with the tone of a guide on a school trip. She then unzipped her bag and pulled out 9mm machine pistols. "The adults walking around outside are very dangerous, but you will be safe as long as you have these *warning buzzers*. The scary adults will run away if they hear the noise from these buzzers. If the adults find you, *just point your buzzer at them and set it off*. Do you understand?"

She then reached for a shopping bag filled with clay-like explosives. She attached the medical electrodes extending from the bags to the children's wrists as she continued speaking with a big smile on her face.

"And these are your *GPS devices*. With them, I can tell where you are so even if the dangerous adults capture you, I will come to rescue you *if you press the secret button to let me know*. So make absolutely sure that you never take off your GPS device!"

She was using the same method she had in her attempt to make Edward Torke attack the Oahu hotel.

She was controlling them by creating a deviation in their knowledge.

From a third party's point of view, she was telling them to do absolutely unthinkable things, but none of the children there were aware of it. The children looked at the guns and explosives with unambitious eyes.

The magician secretly smiled.

At the very least, Leivinia Birdway was in the same shopping mall.

Even if she only needed to get safely and surely farther away from her, the magician wanted to create a great confusion she could escape in.

The current problem was their locations.

The shopping mall had 7 exits and the magician had a chance of being spotted even amid the confusion if she accidentally headed toward Birdway.

To prevent that, she had to contact her collaborator and learn where the enemy was currently located.

However…

"…?"

The magician frowned as she put the cell phone to her ear.

She looked back at the small screen and looked confused.

"No signal?"

Immediately afterwards, men holding handguns burst through one of the smoking area's windows.

They were the poor men who she had used hostages to control.

Part 16

(November 10th – Oahu – Coral Street Shopping Mall – Near the East Entrance – From a CCD camera in a tourist's notebook computer)

Misaka Mikoto and Misaka Worst rushed through the large shopping mall.

Bluish-white sparks intermittently shot from their bangs. Because they had guessed that the enemy was monitoring their movements through the cameras, they were jamming the wireless signals.

"Dahh! I can't stand this… We finally get a call from them and it's just asking us to be human jammers. And to rescue the family of a man who attacked them with a gun but was repelled by a cyborg's power? …That idiot sure is calm about all this. We came all the way to Hawaii, so can't we do something a little more exciting?" complained Mikoto.

"Hmm? Since you were just staring blankly over at that swimsuit shop, how about you take your own advice to heart? Maybe go for a slingshot. Or how about a micro bikini? Or a Brazilian swimsuit? Misaka hears there is a kind with an I-front and an O-back."

“Gwaaaaahhhhhhh!! Does this country have some rule that says the less cloth used, the better!?”

“But if Misaka wore a slingshot, it would be rather tricky because her breasts would make a bridge-like gap between her body and the cloth. But for you, onee-tama, it would be no different from gluing bandages around your body…”

“If you say one more word, I’ll unleash a never-before-seen Rail-Shotgun on you!!”

“…Misaka doesn’t feel too threatened when you say that while holding a shopping bag from Cupid Arrow.”

“Bpfh!!”

“And Misaka isn’t going to respond to that over-the-top reaction either. Misaka is a bit worried about a certain someone’s choker-style electrode. But on the other hand, a malfunction would be quite interesting indeed, so she needs to focus on going all out with her jamming!”

Part 17

(November 10th – Oahu – Smoking Area within Coral Street Shopping Mall – From security camera footage)

The magician’s lips stiffened slightly.

She had looked down on those pawns as nothing more than normal people and had planned to dispose of them along with the hostages, so when those people she clearly saw as small fries charged in with their handguns, she grinned.

“You fools. This only hastens my plans!!”

The magician snapped her fingers. The hostages—the young children who had been standing stock still until then—began to move. With the bags hanging from their shoulders, they turned the machine pistols in their hands toward their family members.

Gunshots rang out.

However, a tragedy did not occur there.

Just before the guns were fired, the shopping mall ceiling collapsed. The one who had brought the shutter of rubble down was Accelerator. And he did not stop there. He manipulated the vector of his momentum to give himself superhuman speed and kicked the bags hanging from their shoulders, sending them flying far away.

A few of the children made a motion as if they were trying to rub their side with their upper arm, but they did not make it in time.

The explosives detonated, emitting a great roar and explosive flames, but they were far enough away that it only shook the building.

"…So you had them set up to spread the damage as far as possible with the guns and then blow up when they died. We took some samples to look into how you do things, you fucker."

The magician was already headed for the exit.

However, Kamijou and Hamazura came running in through the two passageways connecting to the rest of the floor.

"(Not good.)"

She had a bad feeling.

However, it was not due to who was there.

"(I still don't know where Birdway is. Even if I manage to escape amid the confusion here, this could get truly bad if she's lying in wait for me up ahead…!)"

As she backed into a corner of the smoking area, the magician felt sweat dripping along the edge of her nose.

Of course, she was not about to let herself get taken out there.

The magician saw the normal people unhesitatingly aiming their guns at her and preparing to pull the trigger, but that was when the situation changed suddenly.

The cause of this change was a single explosive thrown in from outside the camera frame.

Part 18

(November 10th – Critical Error)

An unknown cause is placing a heavy burden on the FCE.

Self-diagnosing…output of report complete.

The FCE is beginning its reboot sequence.

Part 19

(November 10th – Oahu – Coral Street Shopping Mall – In front of a coin locker – From security camera footage)

Kamijou Touma and Accelerator had jumped into the same area next to the smoking area. Together, they had pushed the hostage children into that area.

“What happened to Hamazura!?” asked Kamijou.

“He jumped out the other exit. He’s with the parents. More importantly, what the hell was that? What idiot intervened!?”

The sound of scraping metal could be heard beyond the black smoke.

Kamijou tried to peer out through the smoke, but Accelerator grabbed him by the nape of the neck.

Immediately afterwards, gunfire rang out.

It was not the sound of a handgun being fired. The explosive noise was deeper and continuous. It was most likely from an assault rifle or something like that.

Which meant…

“This isn’t the occult…” Accelerator muttered. “Then this is a job for me. You take those kids and get out of here.”

“Hey…!”

“I have no intention of getting into a firefight with those kids still here. And your power can release them, right?”

It was true that one of the children Kamijou had pushed to safety was acting differently from before. She was staring in confusion as if she could not understand what was going on. That was most likely due to Kamijou’s right hand having touched her.

Accelerator spoke without turning around.

“I’m best suited for this kind of battlefield, so you hurry up and get out of here.”

“…I’ll repay you for this later. Don’t let yourself get taken out easily.”

Having said that, Kamijou lightly tapped the heads of each of the hostages who were still trying to attack according to the magician’s orders. That was all it took to bring the children back to their senses. Taking them with him, Kamijou started leaving the coin locker and the attackers from the other side of the smoke tried to chase after him.

However, Accelerator stepped into their path as if challenging them.

“It may be a little unfair, but we want to make sure we use the right person for the right job.”

Part 20

(November 10th – Oahu – Coral Street Shopping Mall – Eastern Side of the 1st Floor – From the camera in a tourist’s smartphone)

The explosions and gunfire caused a great panic within the shopping mall. No one was stupid enough to try to catch a glimpse of what was going on. The people sensed a crisis and all tried to get out of the exits at the same time. However, there were simply too many people, so the flow of people got caught near the exits, packing everyone in together.

Mark, one of the men in black suits, asked Birdway a question.

“Do you think it is going well?”

“As the gunfire is not ending, the battle must be continuing. Well, that magician has been getting other people involved while taking it easy on her end of things. It really made me want to take the fight to her. Not getting direct progress reports from the people there is a pain, though. I didn’t realize how thankful I was for cell phones,” she said lightly. “The main reason I wanted to win over the normal people was to get a good idea of where the magician was, but I never expected her to be in the same shopping mall. Luckily, it looks like the multi-sided attack was fairly effective, making this easier.”

“But even if you have people posted at all the nearby exits, there is still a chance that she can slip by in the confusion.”

“I can just follow the flow of magic power. That way, she can’t mix in with the normal people.”

“And if she does not refine any magic power?”

“Unthinkable. This is not a safe zone for her. When a surprise attack could come at any time, she will put up her defenses so she can deal with one. Even if she knows purifying magic power is dangerous, she will be even more afraid of not having any.”

Assuming the current magician specialized in controlling people, Birdway reasoned that she would unhesitatingly flee when attacked head on.

As such, Birdway was waiting at one of the exits for someone who might be the magician to show up.

“Hm?”

Birdway frowned upon catching a glimpse of a figure within the crowd.

“What is someone as famous as that doing here?”

Part 21

(November 10th – Oahu – Coral Street Shopping Mall – In front of a coin locker – From security camera footage)

An armed group of five stepped out of the black smoke and in front of Accelerator.

They were covered in special all-silver military uniforms from the top of their heads to bottom of their feet. The surface of the uniforms glittered like a CD. Their faces could not be seen, but Accelerator could just barely tell from their body shapes that three were men and two were women. They were all armed with special bullpup-style assault rifles. In addition, the men had recoilless guns hanging from their shoulders and the women had intelligence-gathering tools such as high-fidelity microphones and fiberscopes hanging from their waists.

“(…Tch. Are they from Gremlin? Those uniforms look more like electronic camouflage for fooling sensors than something to be used against people.)”

They did not utter a single word.

One of the men held up his rifle and unhesitatingly fired.

However, Accelerator had his reflection.

The man was struck by the bullet he himself had fired and was knocked to the ground, but the other four showed no sign of worry or confusion.

They all took separate actions.

"(…Was he testing to see if I could do it?)"

He had ignored the damage he would take on a personal level and made a calculated sacrifice to control the damage to the group as a whole.

It pissed the #1 off, but it did not change what he had to do.

He manipulated the vectors of the force of his legs to explosively charge forward. The hunt had begun. No matter what the enemy thought or how they moved, Accelerator's reflection was overwhelmingly effective when it came to bullets and explosives. The attackers could do nothing to oppose the #1 as he wiped them out.

But…

There was one left.

Just as he stretched his fingers out before her, bright red blood suddenly burst from Accelerator's right arm.

"…Ah?"

A bullet had not made it past his wall of reflection.

Accelerator could not be harmed even by invisible threats such as gas or a biological weapon.

This had been caused by a non-external threat.

That is, his body was being destroyed from the inside.

The last remaining attacker jumped to the side and Accelerator was unable to correct his motion. He slammed into the wall. Blood was splattered on the wall and it did not quite seem real to him that it was his own.

Still leaning against the wall, Accelerator said, "It…can't be…"

"One fact remains the same for every esper," said the woman as she held up her bullpup-style rifle. "When a scientifically-created esper uses a magical spell, they are assaulted by a certain side effect."

"…You're…a magician…!?"

He tried to shout out but instead coughed up a clump of blood from deep in his throat.

The attackers' movements. The way they had fled. The timing with which they had been taken out.

It had all been calculated out to make Accelerator take certain actions—to make him pull the trigger known as magic.

The specifics of the magic he was made to use did not matter.

It could be something relatively useless like sending a pale light from his fingertips or even something so trivial it could not be seen. What mattered was that they were making an esper use magic.

Accelerator managed to figure that much out, but he could also tell his consciousness was growing muddy.

He had used something like magic in the past, but making careful adjustments while checking on one's limits was very different from charging in unaware.

And a scientific esper's powers were created purely from the brain.

The muddying of his consciousness lowered his calculation ability which in turn had an effect on his control on the macro physical world he could see.

Simply put…he lost his reflection ability.

The woman whose face he could not see held her finger to her rifle's trigger.

"The name Gremlin refers to an occult fairy that causes malfunctions in scientific machines. Had you not given any thought to what that meant?"

Immediately afterwards, a gunshot rang out.

Blood flew through the air. The dull sound of a human body falling to the ground was heard. Dark red blood leaked from the body as it lay on the ground.

However, it was not Accelerator's body.

It was the woman's body after she had been suddenly shot from the side.

Even as she lay on the ground, she held the bullpup-style assault rifle in one hand. She blindly fired in the direction she had been shot from.

But…

“That just isn’t gonna cut it, lady. You aren’t going to hit anything firing wildly like that. Stability is more important than distance. No matter how good a gun you have, you can still miss at 10 meters with terrible form like that,” said a deep male voice.

Two light gunshots rang out and two dark-red holes opened in the woman’s right shoulder. The rifle finally fell from her grasp and her resistance was replaced by groans.

“Don’t even hold a gun if you can’t hit. Are you trying to get yourself killed!? This is the world’s largest gun country!!”

“Who…are you…?” Accelerator asked the boasting man.

“That’s what I’d like to ask you, Japanese boy. I came all the way here to save the children, but you stole my thunder.”

“…Again: who the hell are you?”

“I really wish people would start watching the morning news,” sighed the middle-aged man holding a handgun. “I’m the goddamn president.”

Part 22

(November 10th – Oahu – White Beach Golf Club – From a tourist’s video camera)

The tourists poured out of the shopping mall and fled to the beach and other nearby areas. Unlike with a simple accident or disaster, the people were trying to escape a shooter, so they were mostly heading for other buildings to hide in.

Normally, only members could enter the White Beach Golf Club, but the guards’ shouts did nothing to stop the surging waves of people. They hesitated to draw their guns as a threat as it was an emergency and people’s lives were at stake.

Mixed in with the crowd, the Gremlin magician operated her cell phone.

Birdway and the others had been monitoring all of the exits, but they had not thought of the possibility of her destroying a wall and leaving through that. In a firefight like that, an extra explosion or two did not seem suspicious.

After ringing a few times, the call finally connected.

Without waiting for the other person to speak, the magician shouted into the phone.

“Why did you send *them*!? They were meant for a later stage!!”

“Either way, the plan would have been brought to a standstill if you had been captured back there,” said the young woman’s voice coming from the phone. “And I have things I must do while the enemy is focused on you.”

“Then…”

“They already know what you look like. If it is only a matter of time before the pursuers reach you, we must proceed even faster than planned. From here on out, this is a blitzkrieg. We must shake free of them faster than they can respond.”

Part 23

(November 10th – Oahu – From the in-vehicle camera of an electric cart)

Because he had no idea when the enemy’s comrades would return and injure Accelerator further, President Roberto Katze could not leave Accelerator where he was. Instead, he dragged him into the passenger seat of the kind of electric cart used in golf courses. He wanted to watch the reunion of the hostages and manipulated attackers longer, but they had no time, so he drove off in the cart.

Incidentally, his rental car had been rendered completely unusable. He started to seriously consider whether he could call it a public expense and get reimbursed.

“It’s a good thing this is a tourist area. Electric carts are a lot simpler than a normal car. You’re supposed to input a four digit number, but you can bypass that and start them by opening the cover and connecting a single cord to an open port on the circuit board.”

A certain company had a few different models of electric cart and each one had different types of security, but they all used the same circuit board. Depending on the model of the cart it was for, different electronic parts were connected to that circuit board and different ones of the several input ports were chosen. That was how the different products were given a sense of individuality.

However, holes for electronic parts and input ports not needed for that model still existed.

A common circuit board was used to reduce costs, but that meant a signal could be sent through a route the machine was not made to handle. It was possible to cause an intentional error.

It was because of his interest in those kinds of things that the president was sometimes called the swindler who had risen to a higher position than any other swindler in history. If he was not careful, Hollywood was likely to make a movie about it.

Accelerator clicked his tongue while breathing shallowly.

"…If we had taken one of those damn reinforcements with us, we could've gotten some information."

"That's too much of a burden. I'm no Hollywood star; I can't carry two people at once." The president gave a light smile. "More importantly, you need to do something about that blood. I'm only borrowing this. I'd like for this to end up being a cart of good fortune that is rumored to have been driven by the president, but at this rate it'll be rumored to be a bloodthirsty cart that kills everyone who uses it. I don't want to cause any problems for its owner."

"Tch."

"If you need something to use as a bandage or gauze, take this."

The president handed him a lace handkerchief. It did not look like a man's handkerchief, but that may just have been part of the strategy he used in regard to his image. Accelerator took it with an irritated look on his face.

"…Why did woman's underwear come out with it?"

"Sorry, sorry. That belonged to a career woman I met at a bar two days ago. At some point, it found its way into my pocket."

Accelerator tossed the women's underwear aside and glared over at the president.

"How much do you have to do with this incident?"

"That's what I want to know from you, Japanese boy. This is my country. Do you realize you're having a barbecue in someone else's yard without asking?"

"…"

"Currently, the occult is running rampant through the White House and Congress. Its tentacles have spread through the military, the police, and the intelligence agencies. The phenomena you saw back there have eaten into all of the public institutions. In some cases, it has reached people who have the authority to decide to invade another country. The bastards using the occult are using living people to put together their own force."

"…In concrete terms, how far has it spread?"

“Who knows? It could be a few hundred people or it could be a few thousand. It’s beyond the point where we can tell that kind of thing. What I do know is that something isn’t right in this country. There’s no convenient test, so telling apart the affected and the unaffected is difficult. Areas that were safe the day before are not necessarily safe today.”

“Is it Gremlin?”

“What’s that?”

“A magic cabal…that is, a group that uses the occult…that is hiding here in Hawaii. To be honest, I don’t know many of the details myself.”

“Does someone in that group have the power to control people?”

“Yes.”

“…I see. So you’re a Japanese hunting dog that has chased the rabbit here and so we’re starting to catch glimpses of the enemy’s tail in our sights.”

But if what Roberto said was true, it was possible Gremlin’s influence was not confined to Hawaii.

It would mean they had eaten into the entire country.

The enemy could possibly wield the military and intelligence gathering power of that nation.

“(…Dammit, Birdway. What was that about an incident *possibly* occurring? If you want to stop this, you need to start moving before it’s already checkmate.)”

The president operated the steering wheel as he drove up onto the freeway. The electronic cart had no windows or walls, so a dry wind blew on them.

Accelerator and President Roberto Katze had a common enemy.

All the circumstances were connected.

Accelerator started thinking about that fact, but joining forces with the president did not give them the power of America itself. After all, the country was already being eaten into by Gremlin. He decided joining forces with Roberto Katze as an individual was the best they could hope for.

“So these occult bastards making up this Gremlin group are controlling important people within the US in order to take over the center of the government and the military,” said Roberto.

“Possibly.”

“…Or that’s what I thought.”

“Ahn?”

“If so, what happened back there was odd. Do you remember? That girl controlling people with the occult was using those children as shields and having them target normal people.”

“Are you talking about how that group of what seemed like professional soldiers cut in partway through? Their equipment was weird, too. That CD-like uniform was electronic camouflage. That’s meant to be used against high-tech sensors, not people. But I thought no military actually used it because they all hated how it looks.”

“If they had been planning to use those soldiers from the beginning, they would have simply relied on them instead. I don’t see why they would go out of their way to use those normal people who could possibly turn on them.”

“And yet the magician used them.”

“There is something there. We’re just not seeing it.”

Part 24

(November 10th – Oahu – Green Café Iwamaki – From the camera in the tablet terminal installed on the table)

“There we go,” muttered Birdway as she looked at the papyrus.

It was the spiritual item she was using to automatically analyze the magician’s spell.

Kamijou, Hamazura, and Kuroyoru looked at the papyrus, but they could not understand what they were seeing.

Birdway ignored them.

“She is indeed from the Russian Orthodox Church. Mark, compress the analysis data from the papyrus and send it to our contact with the Russian Orthodox Church. Ask them—politely—if they have any idea who she could be.”

“…Do you really think they will answer honestly?”

“As the main battlefield of World War III, Russia is in the process of being restored by Academy City’s technology and America’s funds. Gremlin is currently damaging both of those. Tell them any delays on our part could have a major effect on their recovery.”

Kamijou made sure not to touch the spiritual item and asked, “Do you know how her magic works? What’s its weak point?”

“Ugh, someone explain it to him.”

“Ah, I have a response from the Russian Orthodox Church. That was incredibly fast. Especially for a bureaucratic job,” Mark cut in.

“That last comment must have done its job,” said Birdway as she snatched the tablet computer from him. “Her name is Saronia A. Irivika. 14 years old. Comes from Yekaterinburg. She proudly thinks of herself as European and hates having Russia be called part of Asia more than anything. Well, that last bit is about as stereotypically Russian as you can get.”

She used her index finger to scroll down.

“During World War III, she was deployed to Vladivostok to stop Academy City forces from landing, but had little to do since the invasion was primarily carried out by supersonic bombers. She disappeared in the confusion of the end of the war. Her whereabouts since then are unknown.”

“Them”.

Gremlin.

Those created by the war who did not wish for the war to end.

“So is this Saronia trying to overturn the result of the war as a Russian soldier…?” asked Hamazura

“It’s possible,” Birdway replied as she shoved the tablet computer back toward Mark.

“Then is Gremlin a group of those who lost the war and want a comeback? Do they just want to redo the war?”

“I thought I told you personal objectives had more of a priority than an overall ideology. The group and an individual will not necessarily align. It would best to have as few preconceptions about them as we can.”

Suddenly, Kamijou’s cell phone started to ring.

He answered it to find it was from Accelerator.

“I know what Gremlin is after. I don’t know what their ultimate objective is, but I know what one of the means to get there is.”

“One of the means to get there?”

Kamijou quickly switched over to speakerphone so everyone there could join in the conversation.

As soon as he did, Accelerator got to the core of the issue.

“Gremlin seems to be trying to obtain the Trigger.”

“The Trigger…? That’s rather vague. Is it from the science side or the magic side?”

“Technically, it’s called the Small Scale Induction-Style Active Volcano Controlling Device, but that’s a pain to say, so they call it the Trigger. The device is being developed by the American military.”

“…I don’t like the sound of that name.”

“As the name suggests, it’s a toy used to control the activities of an active volcano. It can’t stop a volcanic eruption, but by distributing the energy of the explosion, it can control the damage done. To keep it simple, you can think of it as a device that uses a special combination of explosives to apply stimuli to the underground magma which artificially causes small scale eruptions. By letting the pressure escape before a major eruption occurs, the worst case scenario can be avoided.”

In addition to the avalanches and pyroclastic flows that directly damaged the areas at the foot of the volcano, air lanes had been cut off by volcanic ash in recent years. Given how much economic damage from natural disasters such a device would avoid, it was certainly worth researching.

“You’re saying Gremlin is after that?”

“To be specific, the people being controlled by Gremlin all seem to have been searching for data on this Trigger,” spat out Accelerator. “But the Trigger really only applies the proper stimuli to the underground magma and that’s it. If it’s intentionally used incorrectly, it could be used to cause a major eruption.”

If Gremlin was after the Trigger, it was almost guaranteed that they were planning to cause a major eruption in some active volcano. In fact, that was about the only way the Trigger could be used.

But where?

Which active volcano was Gremlin going to detonate?

“Kilauea,” replied Accelerator. “That’s the largest active volcano in the Hawaiian islands, so that has to be it.”

“Kilauea, hm?” muttered Birdway quietly. “The opening at its peak alone is over a kilometre in diameter and it has other smaller openings lined up for 20 or 30 kilometers.”

“…The Trigger is a system that can artificially cause volcanic eruptions, right?“ asked Kamijou.

Accelerator clicked his tongue and responded.

“If Gremlin uses the Trigger, they can even cause eruptions that would be impossible naturally. In the worst case, it’s possible they could send lava erupting from all of the openings at once.”

“Kilauea is on the island of Hawaii and over 80% of its area is mountainous. The network of roads has brought development onto the mountainsides, but most of the population is still focused in the few level areas.”

“So if Kilauea has a serious eruption…the lava would all flow there…?”

“*And that’s only what would happen with a normal eruption*,” said Accelerator. “If an artificial eruption is caused using the Trigger, it will not end there. Apparently, Kilauea will start a chain reaction that will spread through underground connections to Mauna Loa, Mauna Kea, and Hualalai, causing them all to erupt. If that happens…”

“Well, all of the island of Hawaii will be washed over with lava,” said Birdway easily as she ignored Kamijou and Hamazura who had fallen speechless. “If you add the residents and tourists together, I guess the death toll would probably be around 500,000. It isn’t fun to think about, but it is on the scale of what I would expect from them.”

CHAPTER 3

The Target of the Scorching Lava.

Case_to_War.

Part 1

(November 10th – Oahu – Main Road – From a camera in a public bus)

Kamijou, Mikoto, and Birdway were riding in a large bus.

Hamazura, Misaka Worst, and Kuroyoru had gone elsewhere. Kamijou's group and Accelerator's group were attempting to prevent the Trigger from being taken from Oahu, and Hamazura's group was setting up a defensive line near Kilauea just in case.

"So they're going to kill 500,000 people by causing an artificial eruption in Kilauea…"

"…Nnn," groaned Mikoto.

"Do you have a question," asked Birdway as she stared out the window.

"I know these terrorists are planning something monstrous." Mikoto did not have a proper understanding of Gremlin or magic, so that was how she interpreted it. "But didn't you all say that the Senate, the House of Representatives, and all sorts of other government workers were being controlled in order to gather information on the Trigger? Well, I guess they must have someone like our #5…"

"She can most likely control quite a few people at once. What's your point?"

"Doesn't that seem a little indirect? Maybe I'm wrong, but if these people have the power to control a majority of the US Congress, couldn't they change the state of the country without resorting to violence?"

"Yes, if this was just an issue about America," Birdway responded. "But Gremlin is an enemy on an even greater scale. If you look beyond the United States, what they gain from this becomes clear."

“What are you talking about, little girl?”

“Pay attention now. The Trigger itself was developed in American research facilities and the incident itself is making use of a portion of America’s Congress, military, police, intelligence agencies, and other government organizations. If a large scale terror attack is carried out in which Kilauea is artificially set off, the people’s anger will not be aimed solely at the terrorists. It is quite likely that they will be quite upset with how useless the American government is.”

“…”

“Also, Hawaii has many times more foreign tourists than local residents. Most of the victims in this incident would be tourists, so it would no longer be a purely national issue. Many nations, many governments, and many politicians would thoroughly investigate the events leading up to the eruption and America would be harshly blamed for the truth those investigations uncovered. *And every country is in need of money after the war.* …But America of course does not have the money it would take to meet the inevitable demands for reparations they would receive. The chaos would continue on.”

“So they’re trying to damage the entire science side,” spat out Kamijou.

“And all they’re doing is creating an impetus. Once Kilauea erupts, the countries of the science side will start fighting amongst themselves on their own, effectively driving a wedge into the gears of the science side,” Birdway continued.

“…Even if Academy City is at the center of technological development, it is America that keeps the world economy running. If America is struck down, the economy will stagnate. And then…”

“The cycle of unemployment, poverty, and hunger would spread explosively. And despite being at the center of it all, America would be less affected than the more distant emerging nations. Once those surrounding nations learn they are suffering more than the ones that caused it all, their anger will swell up even further. That will complete the downward spiral.”

“So there’s even a danger of terrorism and riots completely unrelated to Gremlin spreading throughout the world? If that happens, everyone will be too busy dealing with that to pursue the traces of Gremlin.”

“Exactly,” Birdway agreed. “They are having America drive cracks into itself using its own power. That is what is important here. That is why they are going out of their way to use such an indirect method.” Birdway grinned. “And this also applies pressure to the other developed nations that support the science side.”

“What do you mean…?”

“When a new enemy appears, normal nations respond by developing more powerful equipment and deploying it. However, this plan involves crushing America using its own device. That means the more a nation augments its military might, the greater the risk. If they want to reduce the risk, they have no choice but to get rid of the very equipment that is supposed to protect them.”

“You mean…?”

“If this plan succeeds and America is utterly destroyed, the other developed nations will come to a standstill. Politicians are human too. After seeing someone fail miserably before their eyes, they will want to avoid doing the same thing.”

“But they can’t fight if they don’t prepare military might!”

“That may be what common sense says, but they will not want to bring all the risk onto themselves. That is simply how politicians think. As such, no one will do anything and nothing will change. A standstill, stagnation, a political vacuum, and obstruction of economic activity…all of that may be their goal or their goal may be to freely strut through the vulnerable world that it creates in order to spread even more destruction. I may not be sure of their overall goal, but at the very least this will bring the world into a state that is much more convenient for a group like Gremlin that hates the postwar focus on the science side.”

Causing five hundred thousand victims and crushing America was nothing more than an impetus for Gremlin.

That way of thinking made Kamijou Touma silently but strongly clench his right fist.

Part 2

(November 10th – Oahu – From the in-vehicle camera of an electronic cart)

Roberto Katze drove the electronic cart with one hand while operating the stereo with the other. Accelerator thought he was looking for a radio news program to get information from, but the radio instead started playing trance music that was rumored to have more to do with the explosive increase of small animals than the waxing and waning of the moon.

"…What the hell are you doing?"

"Trying to relax. Roseline is always bugging me about it. …To be honest, I'm surprised at how much of a burden has been lifted from my shoulders just by finding someone I can be absolutely sure isn't being controlled."

"Do you know where this Trigger is?" asked Accelerator while the electronic cart shook.

"It was primarily developed by the marines because they are sometimes deployed for disaster relief."

"I know the Hawaiian Islands are the cornerstone of the US's defensive line in the Pacific, but how many bases are there here?"

"If you count navy, air force, and marine bases, there are 52. …It's even more if you add in the training areas."

"…Isn't that a bit much?"

"There was a rush to build as many as possible in order to deal with World War III. The war ended much sooner than anyone expected, but money given to a project can't be taken back…or rather, won't be given up. A lot of meaningless construction is still going on."

Accelerator clicked his tongue.

The president grinned and said, "Almost half of the 52 I mentioned are currently being constructed. But parts of those are already functioning, so we can't just eliminate them from being possibilities."

"Then where are we headed?"

"Not even I am reckless enough to just try a blind search. By using my presidential authority on the network, I can gather a certain amount of information on my own."

"Just get to the point."

"We are headed to the largest collection of American military facilities in Hawaii…and therefore the entire Pacific Ocean. I have a feeling even a Japanese boy like you will have at least heard of it."

"Don't make me repeat myself. Just tell me already."

"Pearl Harbor."

Part 3

(November 10th – Oahu – Near Pearl Harbor's Third Marine Base – From a traffic surveillance camera on a traffic light)

Nothing but chain-link fence continued for kilometers.

Kamijou Touma, Misaka Mikoto, and Leivinia Birdway met up with Roberto Katze and Accelerator near that fence.

When Mikoto saw Accelerator, an expression of shock appeared on her face as if she had remembered some bloody trauma, but they did not have time to worry about that kind of thing.

"The Trigger is likely within that fence," said the president as he pointed toward the base with his thumb. "But as you know, even if we do not have the most advanced technology, this is a base of the marines who lead the world when it comes to pure firepower. If we just tried to climb the fence and get through on guts alone, we'd definitely be shot to pieces."

"…You're the president, aren't you? Can't you just give an order to get us in?" asked Kamijou in confusion, but the president only gave an exaggerated shrug.

"A presidential order isn't as convenient in reality as it is in movies. There are a lot of organizations between me and the individual soldiers here and my order may not make it through those organizations if they are being controlled by a third party."

Birdway said, "Saronia A. Irivika, the one controlling people, is attempting to obtain the Trigger, so there is no guarantee the people here in the base would obey the order even if it got here."

"…"

Accelerator and Misaka Mikoto exchanged a wordless glance.

The two of them could force their way into a base that was filled with normal firearms. However…

"Forcing our way in wouldn't be the best plan," Birdway cut in. "This is a large base, so there is no guarantee we will find the Trigger quickly. Continuing the fight the entire time would be difficult and reinforcements would eventually arrive from the other bases. I'm not saying we couldn't win, but I'd rather not turn this place into a sea of flames. …If a bunch of explosions turned the facility into a pile of rubble, *we would have no way of knowing if the Trigger had been here or not.*"

“So to be absolutely sure, we need to confirm the existence of the Trigger here before destroying it,” Kamijou muttered. “But I doubt the security here is lax enough that we can just sneak in.”

Roberto lightly caressed the surface of the attaché case he was holding.

“This base is one of the ones undergoing rushed construction to expand its functionality. That means construction workers are constantly going in and out. It may be easier to slip into than a completely finished base,” he replied.

“…I have a question. Does that create enough of an opening that Asian teenagers walking around won’t seem suspicious?” asked Kamijou.

The president’s expression grew bitter.

Birdway lightly crossed her arms and said, “I could gather a group of white men using my subordinates, but I want as few magicians as possible here since Saronia is involved. It’s possible she would notice if that much magic power was gathered here.”

“Then what do we do?”

“I never said I didn’t have an idea.”

“You know how we can sneak into that marine base?”

“No,” Birdway said as she shook her head. “I know a way we can walk right in through the main entrance.”

Part 4

(November 10th – Oahu – Diamond Marine Harbor – From a tide level monitoring camera)

Hamazura Shiage, Misaka Worst, and Kuroyoru Umidori came to a private yacht harbor in Oahu. It was called a yacht harbor, but it primarily held small ships that used gas engine-powered propellers, had air-conditioned bedrooms, simple kitchens, and shower rooms, and were almost on the level of a villa when it came to facilities and price.

“I can pick the lock,” said Hamazura as he casually removed some wires wrapped around a pillar of the wharf. “But I have no idea how to control a boat. Have either of you ever done it?”

“Misaka has had all that imputed in her by the Testament, but it’s such a pain. Really, you’ll be fine. There are no obstacles in the sea, so you’ll be fine even if you’re a little reckless. Just make sure to learn from your mistakes.”

“You just don’t want to do anything, do you?”

“Ohh? If Misaka has to focus on the ship, her restraint of Kuroyoru-chan may not be entirely effective. Will the End of the Century Emperor be okay then, nyahh?”

“One day, I’m gonna rip you two into eight fucking pieces!! You heard me, eight!! Not seven or nine!! I’ll rip you into eight pieces like a pizza!! Grrrr!!!!!!” cut in Kuroyoru.

“Noooooo!! It’s like you’ve provoked a trained military dog!!”

“Hurry up and pick the lock, so Misaka can get into the air conditioning. If you don’t, Misaka will let her rape you.”

While trembling, Hamazura stuck the wires into the keyhole on the ship’s hatch.

He looked around and said, “The lock itself is outside tech, so picking it is easy enough, but I’m afraid of someone seeing me. Especially since everyone here supposedly has a gun.”

Misaka Worst patted Kuroyoru on the top of the head and said, “Don’t worry. Don’t worry. Kuroyoru-chan will keep watch for you.”

“Why the hell would I do—!?”

“If we add on your cat ear part, you gain a large increase in information gathering ability, right?”

“Fgh!? Wh-why do you have that accessory part…!?”

“Heh heh heh. Resist if you like, but can you prevent the cat ear connection when you can’t use your arms, nyahh? Now, it’s about time you became the cute, cute black cat assassin-chan, don’t you think?”

“Uuh…”

Kuroyoru tried to step back, but she was at the end of the wharf and had nowhere left to flee. Misaka Worst did not especially care about changing Kuroyoru’s appearance, but she approached the cyborg girl with the cat ear part in hand because she wanted to destroy her atmosphere of darkness.

Feeling cornered, Kuroyoru let out a sob. And then…

“Waaaaaaaahhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhh!! Why? Why does this kind of thing always have to happen to meeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeee!?”

“Wah!?” shouted Misaka Worst in surprise as she took a small step back.

Kuroyoru may have been a Level 4 with the power of Bomber Lance, she may have had a portion of Accelerator’s thoughts implanted in her during the Dark May Project, and she may have led the new generation of darkness that were the Freshmen, but she was still fundamentally a twelve-year-old girl.

She had a strong resistance to simple relationships that were nothing but kill or be killed.

However, she was not used to insults of that sort. She simply did not have enough experience with such situations to adlib her way through them.

As Kuroyoru cried and large tears fell from her eyes, Misaka Worst averted her gaze and looked to Hamazura for help. However, Hamazura only looked at Misaka Worst with an expression that said, “Ah, you made her cry…”

Having lost her mental escape route, Misaka Worst thought for a bit.

Finally, she said, “But it hasn’t even been a full year since this Misaka was created and it’s only fair to forgive the youngest one if she’s a little selfish.”

“How can you say that so easily, you villain!?”

With all three of them shouting, they boarded the high class yacht which soon left the harbor.

Part 5

(November 10th – Oahu – Pearl Harbor’s Third Marine Base – From the west gate surveillance camera)

While the same could not be said for an overseas garrison, no one was going to attempt a head on attack of a base in the country. As such, the first thing one had to learn as a guard was how to kill time…or so many people thought. In reality, the guards did have work to do.

This work did not involve harsh firefights with dangerous elements attacking the base. Instead it involved driving off citizens’ groups keeping an eye on the usage of tax money and third-rate reporters who had no good material that week.

In the base, it was known as “crow extermination” and was put on the same level as cleaning the toilets.

(…With the airplane fuel bombing at the airport and the shooting at the shopping mall, I wish they would just give us the order to shoot those bastards up. I don’t need an assault rifle for this crow extermination. A plunger would be enough.)

An African-American marine named Nike Canox tossed aside a gravure magazine and brought his feet from the table and down to the ground. He had heard something over the radio. It seemed the people who would help kill some time that day were on their way.

The assault rifle hanging from Nike’s shoulder was unpopular with the troops, but no one dared mention it to the higher ups. He opened the thin door of the guardroom and stepped outside. He no longer had the benefit of the Japanese-made cold mist sprayer in the guardroom and the annoying sunlight stabbed at his brown skin.

“Stop! Stop right there! Who the hell are you people!?” Nike shouted in the direction of the row of people walking his way.

“I’m the president!! I’ll cut your funding, cowboy! Hurry up and get out the ID reader!!” shouted back a solidly built middle-aged man with tears in his eyes.

When Nike looked closer, he recognized the man from his frequent news appearances. He was the legendary man who had supposedly tried to appear wearing only a speedo in a commercial for an ED remedy, but had been stopped by his monstrous female aide. He was the man who a women’s association on a variety program had said had no character to his proposals. In response, he had said with a smile that he would propose a bill to expand the number of nudist beaches and had subsequently been knocked senseless by his female aide right there in the press conference room.

But who were the children behind him?

Nike was completely dumbfounded, so he simply held out the tablet. The man punched in his social security number and placed his palm on the screen. Nike had assumed he was just an impersonator, but his ID went through perfectly fine for some reason.

Nike pulled the tablet back and shook it lightly.

“…Is this thing broken?”

“What? Do you think that kind of system will ‘just so happen’ to have an error that ‘just so happens’ to let someone through just from getting a bit of dust or sand in it? If you do, send a complaint to its maker, Muscat Computers. In three hours, they’ll sue your for defamation.”

“E-eh? But…eh? Then…”

“I am President Roberto Katze. Surely you know that I disappeared from a press conference in Oahu two hours ago. It may not have been revealed to the public yet, but the news has to have been spreading through the military.”

“O-oh…”

Nike had no idea what was going on and was unsure whether he should salute or not, but the president merely pressed on.

“The truth behind all this is that a terrorist plot is underway that involves abducting me. The people behind me are the civilians who saved me. However, the danger is not over yet. I’d like some help and protection, but we need to get inside here first.”

“No, wait. Wait a second. What am I supposed to do? Oh, right. Contact command. Once the electronic processing is done, I can issue some guest IDs and then…”

“Do you really think we have time to wait? I thought I told you the danger wasn’t over? They’re approaching as we speak. Just getting inside the fence isn’t good enough. We need to think about using the mortars and at the very least need to evacuate into reinforced concrete buildings.”

“B-but…”

“Cowboy.” The president stared Nike in the eye. “When Kennedy was assassinated, a few people besides the shooter had their names carved into history as villains. Even after all these years, the ones that allowed the mistakes in security are seen like that. Do you want to have the same happen to you, cowboy?”

“…Come in…”

It was partly due to the ID reader saying the president was who he said he was, but Nike Canox was mentally overpowered and let him pass.

When the civilians headed for the gate after Roberto Katze, Nike had enough sense to try to stop them, but…

“Those people could very well be targets because they saved me. Cowboy, are you going to throw out these heroes and let them die?”

Nike could not say anything in response.

He could not recall there being any manual for what to do if the president showed up unexpectedly. In a daze, Nike moved aside and let the four civilians into the marine base.

Part 6

(November 10th – Oahu – Pearl Harbor's Third Marine Base – From an auxiliary control camera)

"What just happened?" asked Kamijou for about the dozenth time as they passed through the west gate.

Roberto shrugged.

"Don't ask me. I just nervously did what she told me to do. I thought this base was supposed to have fallen to this Saronia person."

"Oh, it has," said Birdway with a nonchalant expression. "However, her invasion has not reached the lowest ends. Most likely, she only has direct control over the commander at the top."

"How can you be so sure?"

"Because of what happened in the shopping mall," Birdway responded sounding bored. "According to the president, Saronia has control of at least the US Congress and is controlling people in other government and military organizations. We do not know how many people she can control at once, but there are around 600 people in Congress. To hold a majority of those, she needs half that. If she is skilled enough to control that many people at once, don't you think the scene at that shopping mall should have been more of a disaster? For instance, she could have had all the tourists attack us like zombies with new ones added for each one we defeated."

"…Now that you mention it…"

"However, she was only controlling the four hostages," Birdway said as they continued walking. "Assuming the president is telling the truth, Saronia's spell must take time to prepare and must have a limit on the number of people controlled. We can assume she has her hands full keeping her grasp on the nation and therefore cannot spare too many people to fight. In that case, she would want to reduce the cost of controlling this base."

"There are a few barriers that would keep someone from having complete control of the country," said the president with a light sigh. "This Saronia person would need to spread her controlling tentacles across the entire nation to overcome all of those. I can see why she would be barely scraping by."

"So you're saying this person is being more economical by only controlling the commander at the top and using official orders to control those lower down?" asked Mikoto with a tone that said she still did not have a good grasp of the concept of magic.

Birdway nodded and said, “Also, we can assume Saronia’s human controlling magic is somehow special. Normally magic can be used by anyone who knows how, but there are some exceptions. This is one of those.”

“What are you basing that assumption on?” asked Accelerator.

“If anyone could use the magic, Saronia would just have to make someone she was controlling use the same magic. By repeating that, she could control any number of people in a geometric progression. However, that is not happening. Saronia is the only one using the spell and she clearly has limits on what she herself can do with it.”

And Birdway was thinking that Saronia would only be controlling the commander of that American base due to those limitations.

Roberto tilted his head to the side.

“…Then I guess we still have a chance. They will have an order from their commander and an order from me. Technically, I hold a higher position, but I doubt normal soldiers have ever thought about a situation where they would have to choose. I’m sure not all of them will side with me, but they’ll be confused all the same.”

“I think I’ll take this time to explain the papyrus’s analysis of Saronia’s spell.” Birdway folded her arms. “As I thought, her spell has to do with the Russian forest fairy known as the Leshy. The Leshy rules over all of the forest animals and she is controlling people by having them correspond to those animals. I now know that the specific requirement for this uses trees.”

“Trees?”

“It has to be a Russian conifer tree. It can be just a splinter or a leaf, but a target must touch a portion of one to be seen as a resident of the forest and therefore be under Saronia’s control.”

“…Did they have anything like that?” Kamijou asked as he thought back to the situation in the shopping mall.

Birdway smiled thinly and said, “As long as it is made of wood, it can be anything. Even paper or corkboard would work. Lately I’ve been hearing about these paper capacitors. If you slipped those into something, it wouldn’t be hard to get someone to carry it around without them knowing.”

“What happens if they let go of that spiritual item?”

“She loses control of course. However, Saronia will not let that happen. Once she has control, she will surely order them to not let go of it no matter what. In fact, she could just tell them to swallow it.”

“Ueh…” Kamijou groaned.

“More importantly, girl, you said this Saronia is only directly controlling the commander, right?” cut in Roberto.

“Yes. What about it?”

“Then the biggest danger right now is…”

He trailed off as an off-road vehicle appeared near a distant building. In the back of the MP-driven vehicle sat a large well-built man who looked exactly as one would expect of someone in a high position. A military enthusiast might have been able to tell his precise rank from the details of his uniform.

He was the commander of the base.

“Mr. President.”

When he saw the man looking down from the parked off-road vehicle, Kamijou felt his body stiffen. The nameplate on the man’s chest said Bax Silver.

Birdway had said Saronia was lessening her burden by only directly controlling the commander at the top and indirectly controlling the rest through the command structure.

That meant it was possible the other soldiers would not follow an order to shoot the president. No one would want to be known as the man who killed the president.

However, Bax Silver was different.

He was being controlled by Saronia’s spell, so there was a danger of him simply following an order to shoot the president without thinking of the consequences.

The presence of the automatic pistol hanging at his waist seemed especially heavy.

Kamijou swallowed audibly.

With his right hand, he could possibly remove Saronia’s control of the commander, but a few meters was within the kill zone for a handgun.

As Kamijou tried to figure out what to do, the commander made his move.

“I just received word that you were here. I’m so glad you are okay! I will have the base do everything we can to protect you!!”

(…Huh?)

Kamijou's eyebrows moved up slightly and a similar thought seemed to be going through Mikoto's head. Kamijou started to think they were being invited into some kind of trap, but…

"She can't do it," Birdway whispered.

She stepped past the president and toward Bax with a sneer on her face.

"You could kill the president right now, but if you did, you would lose your indirect control over this base in the confusion it caused. That is why you cannot kill him. At least not now. You must wait for the Trigger to be taken from the base."

Bax Silver's body trembled slightly.

It looked more like it was based on someone else's feelings than on the commander's own conflict.

"The fact that she cannot use the commander as a disposable tool proves something else. I already gave the answer, but do you know what that is?"

"…The Trigger is still here?" muttered Roberto before clearing his throat and taking a more "official" tone of voice. "Commander, I would like some information regarding the storage of the Trigger. Where exactly is the Trigger right now?"

Bax's body trembled even more.

Someone was conflicted over whether to take action then or not.

Mikoto and Accelerator lowered their center of gravity slightly, but then…

"…Th-the Trigger is…"

The commander's lips began to move.

He continued to speak as an unnatural sweat appeared on his face.

"…on the runway. It has been authorized to be taken to the island of Hawaii on a transport plane…"

"Let's go," muttered Birdway. "Saronia herself is likely sheltered in that 'most welcoming place'. As Gremlin wishes to use the Trigger on Kilauea, it would be fastest to transport the user along with the device."

"But there are three transport planes? Which one is the Trigger on…?" asked Mikoto as she stared over at the runway.

Suddenly, a gunshot rang out.

Kamijou and the others frantically turned around and saw the base commander had drawn his handgun. However, the bullet had not hit anyone. The nearby MP grabbed him and held him down to the ground. Most likely, the MP had jumped at him before he had fired.

“Don’t worry about him,” said the president quietly. “We will take out the cause and bring this all to an end.”

Part 7

(November 10th – Oahu – Pearl Harbor’s Third Marine Base – Inside the cargo hold of a transport plane – From a maintenance control camera)

Kamijou ran toward one of the three transport planes. Accelerator and Birdway headed toward the other two.

Luckily, the transport planes had not yet taken off. It seemed the cargo had not been fully loaded yet. The cargo door on the back was sitting open. The door doubled as a slope for vehicles, so it hung down onto the asphalt runway.

Kamijou, Mikoto, and Roberto ran toward that slope.

“Why are you following me, Misaka!?”

“If I let you out of my sight now, I get the feeling you’ll disappear again!! …Agh, I don’t want to believe in unscientific things, but maybe I should give that to him now!”

“Mr. President, why aren’t you taking refuge in the base!?”

“This is my country, boy.”

There appeared to be only three transport planes and Accelerator and Birdway were likely headed for the other two.

“Hey!! What are you people doing!? And who are you!?” shouted an Indian American soldier using a military forklift to move a cube-shaped container.

“I’m the president!! If someone make me repeat that again, I’m going to take my Christmas break early to let my heart heal! Just quit what you’re doing and come with me! I have a job for that government-issued item hanging at your waist! This plane is not to take off. I repeat, this plane is not to take off!!”

The forklift driver started panicking as thoughts raced through his head such as, “But that isn’t an order from my direct commanding officer…but at the same time, isn’t the president the commander-in-chief of the military? Also, I’ve never before gotten an order like this that goes straight over the heads of my superiors like a fly ball. What should I do? Should I ask my commanding officer?”

Kamijou and the others ignored him and charged into the cargo hold.

The inside was quite spacious. It looked like a large tourist bus could easily fit inside. Cube-shaped containers like the one the forklift had been carrying were scattered about inside.

Kamijou looked around and said, “Where is it? Where’s the Trigger? Or is it still…?”

“Shouldn’t we find this Saronia person first? If we capture the person behind all this, we can—!?”

Mikoto was cut off as the floor beneath their feet trembled greatly.

A sound like the buzzing of a bee amplified a few hundred times pounded at their ears. By the time Kamijou realized it was the sound of the four propellers starting to spin, the plane had already started accelerating.

And the back cargo door was still open.

Roberto Katze lost his balance and started sliding toward the sloped exit. The end of the cargo door struck the asphalt, sending orange sparks flying.

“Ah!!” shouted Mikoto as she stretched out her hand and grabbed Roberto’s hand just as he was about to fall out.

“Girl, I truly thank you, but you might have only made things worse.”

“What are you talking about? Just hurry up and—!!”

“If I had fallen out before we accelerated too much, I would have only suffered a few scratches. However, I’m sorry to say that I will be torn to shreds if I fall out now.”

“Then let go of that attaché case and grab on with both hands!!”

“As that would directly impact national defense, I have to refuse. I really wish I could though!!”

Meanwhile, the cargo plane continued to accelerate.

Just as it was about to exceed 300 kph, the floor beneath them shook once more. The open cargo door lowered down, creating an even steeper slope.

The plane was taking off.

In that instant, the level of danger someone who fell out would face changed from “very bad” to “instant death”.

Kamijou was well aware of that fact, but he could not lend a hand to Mikoto.

The reason for this was clear.

“Saronia…!!”

A girl slowly walked out from behind one of the containers. She was a Gremlin magician. She was the one with a method of controlling people based on the legends of a Russian fairy known as the Leshy.

Her mostly green clothes, knee-high leather boots, blonde hair, and white skin made her stand out vividly. She may have been lightly dressed for someone claiming to be the ruler of the residents of the forest, but the unrealistic aspect to it seemed to match the idea of the fairy known as a Leshy.

However, she truly did not fit in within the cargo plane filled with nonmetal materials.

She gave off a natural sense of danger like a protected animal such as an alligator or scorpion inside of a city.

Now that she had appeared, Kamijou could not help Mikoto.

Whatever magic she used, she would aim for his back if he focused on saving the president. He would either be simply killed or controlled like a zombie, and he could not allow either to happen.

Without turning around, Kamijou spoke to Mikoto who was still holding onto the president’s hand.

“Can I leave the president to you!?”

“I’ll manage somehow! Dammit…Did they just remove all the metal parts when they made the new version? There’s almost nothing I can grab onto using magnetism…!!”

At the sound of an approaching footstep, Kamijou tightly clenched his right fist.

Saronia specialized in magic that controlled people, but she had no such people there. If Kamijou, Mikoto, and the president could avoid being controlled, there was a good possibility he could get through with his right fist.

But then she used her right hand to lightly snap her fingers.

Immediately afterwards, Kamijou's body was forcefully slammed against the right wall.

He had not simply stumbled over and hit the wall. His feet had completely left the ground. After his back struck the center of the wall like a bullet, Kamijou's breathing literally stopped for a few seconds.

"Gah…bah…!?"

For an instant, he thought Saronia had used some kind of magical attack.

But she had not.

Mikoto and the president had been thrown about, too. If Mikoto's leg had not gotten wrapped around the thick cylinder that opened and closed the cargo door, the two of them would have been thrown out into the sky.

"…I see… So you're controlling the pilot…!!"

"Did you know that even a large cargo plane like this can perform acrobatics?" Saronia snapped her fingers again. "To be fair, no one in their right mind would ever attempt it."

Kamijou had no idea what actions the cargo plane was taking, but he was thrown back and forth. Even when he knew it was coming, he could not just brace himself against it. The very direction of the gravity he felt was changing.

Saronia was keeping her balance by wrapping her arm around a thick wire stretching between the wall and the ceiling. It was likely used for connecting containers together. She brought her other hand to her back.

"What we in Gremlin have come up with to combat your right hand is exceedingly simple."

She pulled something out of her turtleneck. It was a product that could be found lined up even at supermarkets in a major gun country like America.

"We will kill you using normal, everyday methods that do not involve the supernatural at all."

"!!"

Kamijou had no power that gave him the ability to deflect or dodge a bullet.

That was why he instead swung his right foot up from his position on the ground where he had landed after striking the wall. He kicked up the lever holding one of the cube-shaped containers on the ground, unlocking it.

Immediately afterwards, a gunshot rang out.

The plane's acrobatics created a small world that ignored the gravity of the Earth. The container floated up and orange sparks flew as it acted as a shield for Kamijou.

However, the abnormal gravity was not constant.

For an instant, the container had helped Kamijou, but it then "fell" toward him. Still collapsed on the ground, Kamijou frantically rolled to the side. The mass of metal landed next to him and broke to pieces. The simply constructed joints must have broken.

Saronia once more aimed the handgun at him with her right hand.

However, Kamijou was not able to use the same method again. There was no lever nearby for him to hit and there was no guarantee that another container would protect him from Saronia's bullet even if he could release one.

However, she did not fire again.

A different, more powerful physical phenomenon pierced through the cargo plane.

Specifically, it was a current of one billion volts.

Hearing the crackling roar, Saronia frantically headed for cover behind a container but quickly realized a metal container was probably not the best shield against electricity. She grimaced.

With one leg wrapped around the cylinder, one hand grabbing the president's arm, and the other hand pointed toward Saronia, Mikoto smiled fearlessly despite the clearly difficult situation she was in.

"…I may not be able to do much against that strange right hand, but my powers make me almost invincible against 'normal, everyday methods'."

Saronia grinned right back at her. She was looking at the thick cylinder Mikoto was grabbing onto with her leg.

"(…Is she planning to close the cargo door, crushing Misaka in the process!?)"

Having guessed at the enemy's intent, Kamijou cried out.

"Don't worry about Saronia!! Just blow away every container in here!!"

"!?"

With a shocked expression, the magician could not decide whether to aim the gun at Kamijou or Mikoto.

Immediately afterwards, a number of lightning spears shot form Mikoto's bangs.

Tremendous explosive noises and flashes of light burst out. The nonmetal bolts used to lessen their weight melted and the simply constructed containers fell apart. Besides that direct damage, the electric current damaged the delicate equipment within.

Kamijou was not sure what exactly the Trigger was, but he doubted it would remain unscathed after receiving such a high voltage blast.

"Wha—!?" Saronia A. Irivika cried out as she saw the remains of the containers after they had burst, been flattened, crumbled, and been scorched black.

However, that was not because the Trigger had been destroyed before her eyes.

Part 8

(November 10th – Hawaii – Volcanoes National Park – From a bird watching camera)

Hamazura and the others who had split from Kamijou's group had landed on the Island of Hawaii and abandoned the high class yacht they had stolen. The volcano at the center of the issue, Kilauea, was one of Hawaii's greatest tourist attractions. The mountain itself and the nearby volcanic craters were all part of a national park.

The largest crater was at the summit, but dozens of smaller craters existed on the mountainside and near the base of the mountain. They could smell a sulfurous gas smell similar to at a hot spring.

Hamazura and the others were supposed to use stolen vehicles to get to Kilauea before Gremlin and to stop them if they tried to bring in the Trigger.

It seemed Kamijou and the others had a real chance of succeeding, so there was a possibility that Hamazura's group would not have to actually do anything.

However…

"What is that…?"

Hamazura slowly lay down on the edge of a large caldera that was over 10 km across.

Several men were there.

They were much too close to the crater for tourists who were simply looking around. The crater was not as large as Kilauea's famous Halemaumau Crater, but it still had a very dangerous-looking crack a few dozen meters long that glowed orange.

And the men appeared to be setting up some kind of large device. It looked like a giant drum with four legs. The four legs were spread out like a cross and the men were affixing them with special stakes that were driven in using either electric power or compressed gas.

"…I have a bad feeling about this. It reminds me of Russia."

To make matters worse, that one device was not the only one.

A few dozen of the drum-like devices surrounded the large crater.

He had no real proof, but a single term naturally floated up in the back of Hamazura's mind.

"Is that…the Trigger?"

"Looks like it."

"But how? Why!? I thought it hadn't been brought to this island yet!"

"Misaka can only think of one possibility," said Misaka Worst as she lifted her index finger. "The Gremlin…magician, was it? Anyway, that dangerous element the others are after *was not aware of the real plan*. The Trigger was always going to be brought in via a different route, and that dangerous element did not know that. That is why the others were unable to find where the Trigger was stored by chasing her."

"This is bad. This is very, very bad," Hamazura groaned. "If that thing activates, Kilauea will erupt. This isn't just our problem. If the lava comes flowing out, 500,000 residents and tourists will become victims. And if this acts as a trigger that rapidly destroys America's relations with other countries…"

“The situation is unstable enough due to World War III. A lot of countries and regions are dissatisfied with the lack of financial support for the restoration work Academy City is leading. While they may not declare war on America, some politicians will likely get into arguments and start some kind of ‘money-making war’.”

“…So are we gonna do this or not?” asked Kuroyoru who was still upset. She may have received some kind of emotional wound from having them see her cry.

However, Hamazura shook his head and said, “Fighting them head on would be a bad idea. Apparently this Trigger applies stimuli to the magma by detonating various types of explosives in stages, but we have no idea what the specifics are. If it’s a delicate process, we don’t want to start a battle around it. Also, we don’t know how powerful the enemy is. I doubt they’ll want to get burned by the eruption they’re causing, so there should be some time between when they leave and when they detonate the device. We have no choice but to remove the Trigger and neutralize it in that time.”

Part 9

(November 10th – Over Lanai – Inside the cargo hold of a transport plane – From a maintenance control camera)

Mikoto’s lightning attacks flew and destroyed the cubic containers in the transport plane one after another. She was trying to destroy the Trigger that was supposedly in one of them.

However, only what appeared to be military livelihood kits came from within. Items such as frying pans with handles that folded in and small lamps scattered about. Kamijou may not have known what the Trigger looked like, but he could tell that those items were nothing more than basic kitchen goods. He could think of no way that they would help artificially control volcanic activity.

“(…What is going on?)”

Kamijou thought of a few possibilities.

For instance, there had been three planes total. It was possible the Trigger was on one of the other planes, but Saronia had been controlling the base commander who had decided where it would be loaded. She had to have known which plane it was on and there was no merit in splitting herself and the Trigger up.

Also, the plane had taken off before all the containers had been loaded. It was possible they had taken off before the Trigger had been loaded, but Saronia must have known the number of the container it was in.

That was why she had been willing to take off before they were all loaded and why she had not seemed worried when Kamijou had unlocked one of the containers to use as a shield. Otherwise, she should have been worried that it could fall out of the open cargo door.

Which meant…

"You didn't know…? *You had only been told* that the container was one of these?"

The organization that was Gremlin would unhesitatingly use magicians as powerful as Saronia in order to realize their overall plan. They had manipulated her with false information, leaving her looking like a fool.

Cendrillon and Saronia A. Irivika were not the only ones behind the incident.

Someone else was there.

Most likely, this person was hidden even deeper.

"…"

For a while, Saronia remained motionless.

She must have been analyzing what had happened to her.

However, neither Kamijou nor Saronia had much time to think.

Saronia realized Mikoto was adjusting her aim and the magician immediately moved her handgun. However, she did not aim toward Mikoto. Instead, she aimed for the front of the plane and fired every last bullet she had.

"The pilot!!" Roberto Katze cried out.

Kamijou and Mikoto faltered slightly upon realizing what he meant. While they did, Saronia grabbed a bag-like object from where it hung on the wall. It was an emergency parachute. The plane naturally and gently ascended and Saronia used the slant toward the back cargo door to charge toward the exit.

Just before she passed by Mikoto, the #3 desperately fired a lightning spear that struck Saronia full on. Saronia's body went slightly limp and her consciousness seemed to grow dim, but she still unhesitatingly jumped from the edge of the sloped cargo door with a smile on her face.

Mikoto clicked her tongue and cursed.

“There’s no point in heading after her! The president takes priority!!”

Kamijou headed next to Mikoto on the cargo door and grabbed Roberto’s arm. A wrong move could have sent all three of them tumbling into open air, but they managed to drag the president into the plane.

“…H-how much do you weigh? I think you’ve been eating too many burgers.”

“I may not look it, but I don’t even weigh 90 kilos. I only use the burgers to appeal to the younger demographics. Roseline is always telling me I would get more votes if I lost weight, but I think I’m pretty slim given my height.”

After catching his breath, Kamijou recalled the situation they were in.

“Misaka, check to see if there are any more parachutes.”

“What about you?”

“I’m going to check on the pilot. If those bullets made it through the wall, he might be injured.”

“I’ll go too,” added the president. “I doubt you’ll be able to communicate properly with just Japanese.”

“The pilot might attack you on Saronia’s orders.”

“If he’s doing well enough to try, then I’ll be happy.”

Kamijou and Roberto stepped over the wreckage of the containers and headed for the cockpit.

Part 10

(November 10th – Over Lanai – From the video records of the cargo plane’s recorder box)

As Kamijou had expected, the handgun had fired straight through the thin wall separating the cockpit from the cargo bay. Not only had some of the numerous bullets that had passed through the cockpit hit the pilot, but some had cracked the canopy.

It may have only been the lack of a pressure change due to the open cargo door that had prevented the canopy from shattering.

And…

The white man who looked around 30 was bloody and leaning against the console. It was unclear whether he was still under Saronia's control or if she had simply abandoned him, but it really did not matter.

Kamijou ran over and shouted at the pilot while *grabbing his shoulder with his right hand.*

"Shit, are you okay!?"

"He seems to be conscious, but he was hit directly in the back three times. All of the bullets left his body, but these aren't wounds for which first aid is going to cut it."

"All I can think to do is cover the wounds. Is there anything else?"

"That's enough. With a limb, we could tie it off to temporarily cut off the flow of blood, but for the body, it would just crush his organs."

They tried to tear the pilot's jacket that they had removed to get a look at his wounds, but the tough military uniform would not tear. They managed to prepare a few strips of cloth they could use for first aid by cutting it with the knife hanging at the pilot's waist next to his handgun.

That was when Mikoto entered.

"I found a few parachutes!"

"…That could be difficult for him," said the president quietly as he looked at the pilot's wounds. "The shock when the parachute deploys is the same as landing from a fall of a few meters. It just knocks the breath out of someone with a healthy body, but it wouldn't be a good idea for someone who has possible internal injuries."

"…I…don't mind…" said the pilot while still leaning against the console, moving his lips that were sticky with blood. "You all go ahead and jump. I will at least make sure to aim the plane for the ocean…"

Kamijou and the other two exchanged a glance.

Mikoto sighed and tossed the parachutes to the ground.

The pilot's eyes filled with a vague doubt.

"What are you…?"

“We are going to help you,” the president said as he placed his hand on the pilot’s shoulder. “However, we are not helping you crash into the ocean. Let’s aim a little higher and try for an emergency landing.”

Part 11

(November 10th – Hawaii – Volcanoes National Park – From a bird watching camera)

The mystery men left after 20 minutes.

Even though he knew waiting for them to leave was the best strategy, watching a device that would take 500,000 lives be set up was not exactly good for Hamazura’s heart. He could not believe how casually Misaka Worst and Kuroyoru Umidori were taking it.

After he saw the group that was likely related to Gremlin leave in a four-wheel drive vehicle, Hamazura slid down the side of the caldera and approached the crater at the center. He could smell the sulfuric gas and could feel the temperature rise suddenly. The Gremlin group must have been wearing some kind of special suit under their clothes.

“What do you think!?”

“It’s probably set up to send powerful vibrations underground from multiple angles at once in order to regulate the pressure of the magma. There are no cables connecting the individual devices and no wireless signals, so the detonation must be timer controlled and each one is a completely isolated system.”

“So we can’t stop all of them by destroying one central system.” Hamazura looked around. “At a glance, I see over 20 of them and we have no idea what the time limit is. Don’t tell me our only option is to open the cover and cut a cord like in a movie for each and every one of them!”

“…There’s a simpler way,” said Kuroyoru as she pointed toward one at random. “They went out of their way to stake the legs down. Most likely, the explosion is highly directional and it sends its shock wave directly into the earth like a spear. And that means…”

“We just have to remove the stakes or destroy the legs and then knock over the drums!”

“Well, Misaka would hurry if she was you,” said Misaka Worst with a grin. “Even if these are meant to control volcanic activity, they’re still basically bombs. We have no idea when they’re going to detonate and Misaka would rather not get caught up in the blast.

And that goes for the simple blast of the explosives as well as the blast of Hawaii's largest active volcano erupting."

Part 12

(November 10th – The Ocean near Lanai – From the video records of the cargo plane's recorder box)

The transport plane's pilot did his best to carry out his duty, but he could barely move. Kamijou, Mikoto, and the president followed his instructions and dealt with all the controls other than the control column.

"…First close the back cargo hatch. Use that button. If the plane is sealed, the air inside will act as a float. That's necessary for an emergency landing on the ocean…"

Kamijou and the others pressed the buttons as they were instructed, but they had no real feel for what effects the buttons were having. However, they could clearly tell that their altitude was dropping. Even so, they were not stable. The floor lurched beneath their feet and unpleasant changes in gravity threatened to bring up the contents of their stomachs.

It was much too dangerous a situation to call it a journey through the sky.

The threat to their lives showed them just how unnatural it was to disobey gravity.

"…There are no do-overs for an emergency landing on the ocean. We have one chance. If you want to give up, now is the time. Once our altitude drops below a certain point, those parachutes will be of no use. Are you sure you want to do this…?"

Kamijou smiled once he received a translation from Mikoto.

He ignored the numbers quickly scrolling by on the altimeter and said, "I've already made up my mind on that, so just tell me what I need to do to land."

"You've got guts." The bloody pilot lifted up his upper body once more. "But protecting the president is my duty."

Part 13

(November 10th – Hawaii – Volcanoes National Park – From a bird watching camera)

Kuroyoru Umidori and Misaka Worst were the only ones that were any real help.

Giant spears made of nitrogen sliced directly through the legs supporting the drums. Misaka Worst accelerated iron nails in her hand that blew away the stakes connecting the legs to the ground. With their supports, even a Level 0 like Hamazura could easily push over the drums. That way, the Trigger could not carry out its proper function.

However, the drums were numerous.

And they had little time.

As Misaka Worst watched, a red light appeared in the center of the side of one of the toppled drums. Guessing what the ominous light meant, she frantically looked around. Just under half of the drums were still standing. They all had the same red light.

"Not good…" Misaka Worst muttered before yelling out to Hamazura and Kuroyoru who were still working. "Not good!! We aren't going to make it! They're going to detonate!!"

"There are still some left on the other side of the crater!!"

"If we stay here we'll be caught up either in the shockwave from the explosives or the lava from the volcano!!"

"500,000 lives are at stake! Are you saying we just let them die!?" Hamazura yelled back.

However, Kuroyoru's arms dropped down limply as if they had been switched off. Misaka Worst had likely done something to her.

The girl shrugged her barely moving shoulders and said, "If you want to keep working on your own, feel free."

"Dammit…!!"

The legs and stakes holding the drums in place could only be destroyed with Misaka Worst or Kuroyoru Umidori's powers. Hamazura alone could not change the situation no matter how persistent he was.

That was likely Misaka Worst's intention.

Misaka Worst heard a footstep. Her cheek twitched slightly when she realized it was from Hamazura heading back for the Trigger.

"Hey! Misaka really will abandon you here!! She has no obligation to stick around!!"

"You're not going to convince him," said Kuroyoru as her unmoving arms swayed. "Hit him with your high voltage current."

A loud zapping noise rang out.

After she confirmed that Hamazura had collapsed to the ground, Misaka Worst gave Kuroyoru control of her arms once more.

She pointed toward Hamazura with her chin and said, “Carry him. If we don’t get out of here soon, we’ll be surrounded by lava!!”

“Can you not see how much bigger than me he is?”

“My arm is broken, so I can’t do it.”

After making sure Kuroyoru was carrying Hamazura over her shoulder like a bag of rice, Misaka Worst looked back over at the still functioning Trigger.

“They set up over 20 units to get the result they wanted. With about half of them down, things shouldn’t go quite as they planned!!”

“How about we run rather than talk? I don’t know where exactly the lava is going to flow, but the inside of the caldera is going to be a lake of lava!”

The two girls started to flee.

To get out of the caldera, they had to climb up a slope.

They ran as quickly as they could, but running out of a caldera that was over 10 kilometers across would have been difficult for even a professional marathon runner. Kuroyoru clicked her tongue, removed her right arm, and shot it away like a rocket by firing a nitrogen spear. After ensuring it had a strong grasp on the ground where it landed far ahead, Misaka Worst used her magnetism to pull the three of them to the arm.

“How about we join forces as the villain girl combo?”

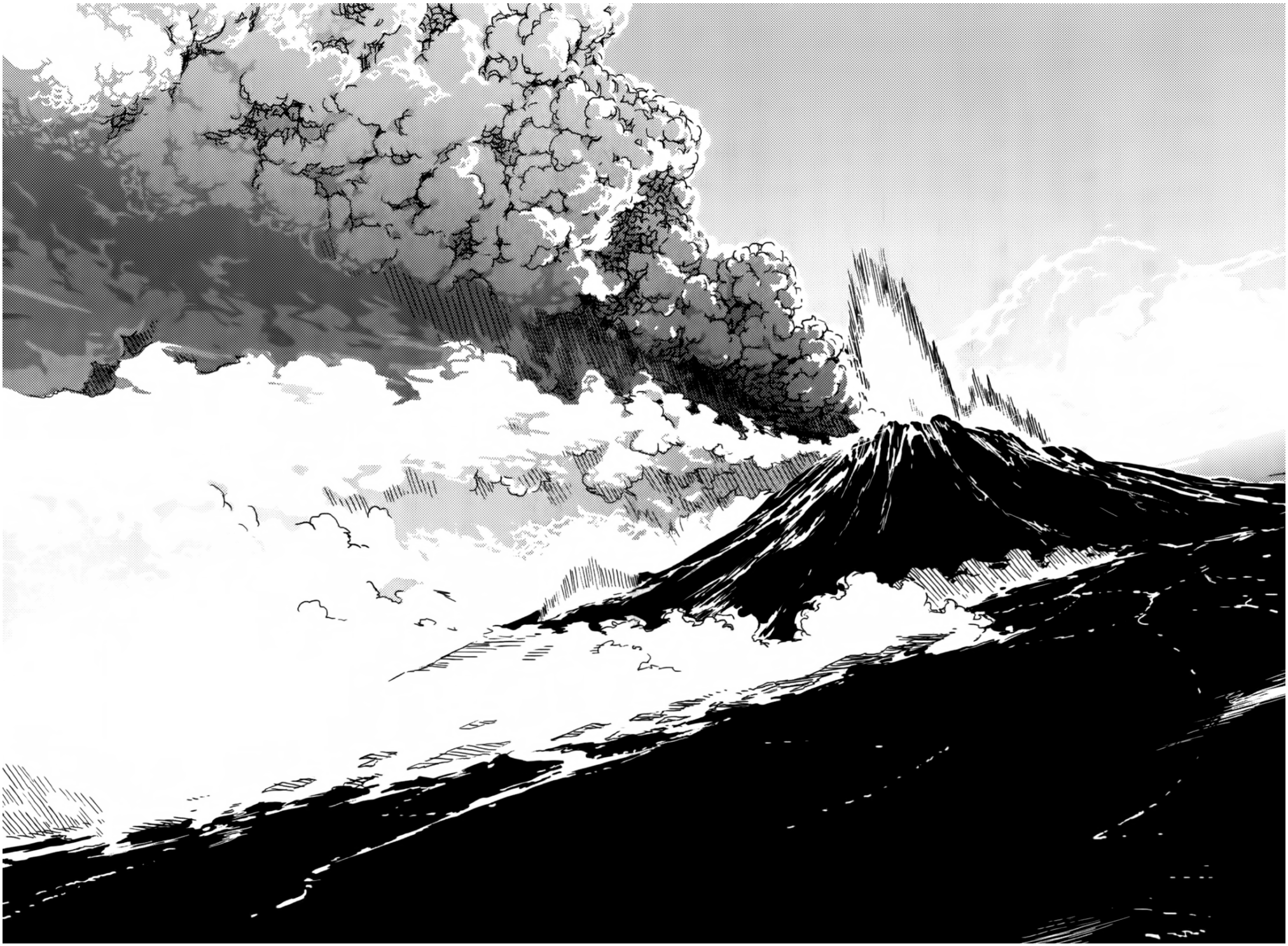
“If you keep fucking with my systems using your magnetism, I really will scrape your brains out of your skull!!”

By picking up her arm and then repeating the procedure a few times, they finally reached the edge of the caldera.

But that was the limit.

There was a deep explosive noise that started as a trembling deep in their stomachs.

Immediately afterwards, everything was covered by a blast of wind and tremendous heat that made the heat from before seem like nothing.



Part 14

(November 10th – The Ocean near Lanai – From a patrol camera)

A military transport plane floated in the gentle ocean.

However, Arc Daniels felt more bored than relieved as he held the helm of a marine patrol boat. He had been piloting all the way from the Third Pearl Harbor Marine Base on Oahu. Normally, a base on Lanai would have handled it.

“There he is! Just as reported, Mr. Scandal and the others are standing on top of the transport plane!!” shouted one of his colleagues on the deck.

Most likely, similar excitement was occurring on the other patrol boat alongside him. Only those at the helm remained anxious.

“That was completely reckless. Does he have any idea how dangerous an emergency landing like that is?”

“This is probably another one of his stunts to get votes. They’ll probably start calling him the man loved by lady luck or something.”

The marines may have said those kinds of things then, but they quieted up once they were within earshot of the president. About half of the plane had sunk underwater, but the roof was still a few meters above the surface. It was quite a bit higher up than the small motor boat that had been modified into a patrol boat. They fastened a rope to a lightning rod-like unit on top of the transport plane and lowered down those needing rescue.

The original plan had been to directly return to Oahu, but the pilot had been shot. They had no choice but to stop by a hospital on the much nearer Lanai.

The transport plane had reached an area 40 meters from Lanai’s coast. If it had gotten any closer, the belly of the plane would have scraped the bottom which could have led to a different result.

The pilot was in real danger, but he could still be saved if they acted quickly.

The successful emergency landing alone was worth celebrating.

However, the president and the others who had been with him were not celebrating their survival. They were not looking at the plane they had been on or at Lanai where they were headed. They were all looking in the same direction and had nothing but urgency and tension on their faces.

Arc turned his head in the direction they were looking and then understood.

The blue sky had turned black.

What looked like a pitch black thunderhead was actually volcanic ash. It was coming from the direction of the Island of Hawaii. The first thing that came to Arc's mind was Kilauea.

"It really…erupted!?"

"You've gotta be kidding me. We couldn't stop the Trigger…? Weren't 500,000 people's lives counting on that!?"

"No." The president started saying something in Japanese. "Kilauea is the type of active volcano that sends a lot of soft lava spewing out when it erupts. To cause huge amounts of damage to the areas at the base of the mountain, they would only have had to cause an eruption like that but on a greater scale. Something is odd about this. There shouldn't be that much volcanic ash in the air…"

"So you're saying the explosion didn't go how Gremlin planned it to?"

"I don't know. …Corporal! This ship can access the internet in order to connect to the smart system for linking units, right? After all the money we gave you, I won't let you say no. I want to hook up my Imperial Package and gather some—"

The president suddenly stopped speaking because of a long, narrow trail of smoke.

A somehow spear-like trail of white smoke was approaching from the coast of Lanai. However, it was not coming from the closest point of the coast. Instead, it was coming from a point jutting out from the island over 10 kilometers to Arc's right.

Arc immediately understood what it was that was flying just above the ocean surface toward them.

"An…anti-ship missile!?"

"Shit, jump into the sea!!" someone yelled.

Seconds later, the missile mercilessly struck the side of the other patrol boat accompanying the one Arc Daniels and the others were on. The small ship continued in its original direction, but the blast sent it arcing through the air where it slowly passed over Arc's head.

The soldiers who had managed to dive into the ocean came up for air.

The fact that they had escaped relatively unscathed meant…

“Mr. President! That was most likely the Narwhal that was joint developed by the EU!! It’s an anti-ship missile designed solely to open a hole in the side of a ship. Its power and size are kept to the bare minimum to minimize price and transportation costs. The shockwave is sent straight ahead like a spear, so the blast can be escaped by just getting a few meters away!!”

“But who is attacking us…? What is going on…?”

“More are on their way!! Jump into the sea! Hurry!!”

More long, narrow trails of white smoke sliced through the air toward them. Their patrol boat could move quite quickly, but it could not maintain the kind of speed that would be needed to lose a missile.

The president and the Asian teenagers who were accompanying (?) him did as they were told and jumped into the ocean. With his serious injuries, the pilot could not be exposed to the seawater, so Arc’s fellow soldiers sealed him inside a reinforced rubber bag and dove into the ocean. It was hardly the time to worry about the fact that it was actually a body bag.

After making sure everyone else had gotten out, Arc Daniels followed suit.

Immediately afterwards, numerous anti-ship missiles struck the abandoned patrol boat and mercilessly blew away their transportation.

“Is the bombardment over…?” asked Arc tentatively.

Using his “official” tone of voice, the president replied, “I doubt they have sensors that can detect individual people. They are going to send out a unit to see if we are dead, so we need to thank our lucky stars that we are alive and get out of here.”

“S-send out a unit? What is going on here!?”

“Don’t ask me,” said the president.

“Th-this means war… I don’t know what country is behind this, but if they’re trying to kill our president on such a large scale, we need to get revenge…!!”

“Mister, as long as they don’t actually kill me, it doesn’t matter. I’m not going to waste our soldier’s lives on something like that.”

The anti-ship missiles had been a model that had been joint developed by the EU, but bombing Europe over it would have been beyond stupid. Even if the weapons had had flags drawn on them, the evidence would still have been weak. If it was intentional misdirection, the United States would end up targeting completely unrelated people.

“Mister, you said those missiles were Narwhals, didn’t you?”

“Wh-what about it?”

“Do you know the specific model? Were they Ds or Rs?”

“I-I’m sorry, sir. I’ve heard before that the different models sound different, but I can’t actually tell them apart that way…”

“Not only are Narwhals relatively easy for other countries to get their hands on due to being a joint project, but the D model was specifically designed as an export model to obtain foreign currency. However, they are quite expensive and their maintenance format is too unique, so no non-EU countries have bought any. …Only a few Gray Flags have bought them.”

“…Gray Flags?” Arc audibly gulped. “You’re saying mercenary PMCs are behind this!?”

“Perhaps. I can’t deny the possibility of it being some other country, but there would simply be too much of a risk of us taking revenge on them as you suggested before. This simply does not seem like something anyone with a set homeland would do,” spat out the president. “But whoever it is that has been sneaking around behind the scenes has now shown themselves in a big way. It isn’t going to end here. Most likely, they’re beginning an avalanche-like offensive.”

“S-so they’re declaring war on us?”

“This would be a lot easier if we were up against people gentlemanly enough to do something like that,” Roberto said as he pointed straight up. “Even if it wasn’t complete, Kilauea still erupted and it looks like that ash is going to cover the sky. Do you know what that means, corporal?”

“That airplanes can’t fly through here?” cut in the Asian girl in English.

“Yes. That means no emergency reinforcements from the mainland in the form of fighters or bombers. And,” added Roberto Katze, “if those anti-ship missiles are deployed across the Island of Hawaii as well as Lanai, then we can’t expect any bombardments from ships or landing operations using landing ships. Evading anti-aircraft missiles in a fighter that can fly at Mach speeds is hard enough, so there is no real way to evade anti-ship missiles with ships that cannot go any faster than a few dozen kilometers per hour.”

“So the Hawaiian Islands are completely isolated…?”

“Since they waited to carry out such a brazen attack until after causing the eruption, it seems to me that they were trying to create this isolation. The isolation itself may have been their objective or it may have been nothing more than preparation to give them the freedom to do something else.”

“B-but the Hawaiian Islands have more bases than any other region in the Pacific! The firepower we have here should be more than enough to—!!”

“That assumes this will be a simple clash of firepower,” said the president with a bitter expression. “But our enemy has a kind of power to which common sense does not apply. I have seen it with my own eyes. And this missile attack shows that they also have plenty of power to which common sense *does* apply. …They have the power of numbers that is supposed to be the strength of our United States.”

As the president spoke, he seemed to be arranging all the information in his own head.

What would happen when those two powers were brought together?

How much damage would be done?

He gritted his teeth and said, “At any rate, their plan has advanced beyond a certain point, bringing everything more to their favor.”

CHAPTER 4

Isolation and the Collapse of the Rules.

Trident.

Part 1

(November 10th – California – Grand Arrow Air Force Base – Central Control Room – From a camera for recording military activities)

The commotion in the Hawaiian Islands had spread all the way to the largest air force base on the west coast. The commotion was greatest for those in command rather than for the maintenance workers performing the final checks on the fighters or the pilots waiting for orders.

Alfred Thirdman, the base commander, glanced over the thick documents and tossed them aside. He stomped on the useless pieces of paper with his boot and shouted in anger.

“You fools!! We can investigate who this enemy force is later! Right now, the president’s safety takes priority, so we just need to kill all of the enemies! Did you not hear me ask you to calculate whether we can attack or not!? What is the situation regarding the spread, altitude, and density of the volcanic ash!?”

The satellite imagery showed something baffling.

A large number of soldiers were landing on the eight main islands forming the Hawaiian Islands. It seemed a few of the tankers and passenger ships off the coast had been disguised landing ships. A large number of hovercrafts were bringing in soldiers and weapons such as off-road vehicles, armored vehicles, and even anti-ship missile units.

A quick estimate said there were just under 7,000 soldiers.

However, in addition to those soldiers to fight on the front lines, there were likely maintenance workers and communications officers for logistical support. With those included, it was possible the number was as high as 10,000.

It was too great a force to function as a single division.

Alfred felt the blood vessels in his temples throb uncomfortably as he thought about the fact that they had *somehow overlooked* so great a force and that they had been allowed to invade American soil.

One of Alfred's subordinates gave a report while looking frightened either of the situation developing or of his own commander.

"Th-the ash has spread over quite a large area around Kilauea and with a very high density. We are using the satellite's laser scanning, but the visibility is very nearly hopeless. If an airplane is launched into ash that dense, it is almost guaranteed to have engine trouble…"

"Is it due to a trade wind? If so, the ash should be spreading mostly in one direction. Areas to the west like Guam or Yokosuka might be out of the question, but surely we can provide air support from here on the mainland!"

"While it is greater in that direction, the ash is spreading in every direction. W-we cannot get closer than 300 kilometers."

Alfred clicked his tongue and kicked the useless console as hard as he could with the end of his boot.

The Hawaiian Islands had more of America's military might than anywhere else in the Pacific, but not even that gave him hope about the developing crisis. Even then, Aegis ships anchored in naval ports were being blown up one after another.

It actually seemed fortunate that the nuclear-powered aircraft carrier Hubble Lotus was out in the South China Sea.

"The president is there. Are you saying we should just sit here doing nothing while anti-ship missiles are being deployed all across the Hawaiian Islands and a military force of unknown affiliation is invading?"

"N-no, but…"

"It seems support with warships is our only option."

"Those anti-ship missiles rule that out. With current technology, it is difficult to avoid missiles that fly only a few meters above the surface of the—"

Without letting his subordinate finish speaking, Alfred kicked the console again.

After a bit, he said, “Open a connection to Dirty Lance in Texas. They are likely thinking the same thing over there.”

“T-to that ballistic missile launching ground!? But the president is there, not to mention all the other people…!!”

“I have no intention of using a nuclear missile and will not fire any kind of missile on our own country. And at this stage, I have no intention of suggesting we go to war.” Alfred looked over at the projector. “We will detonate normal warheads at high altitude to blow away the scattered volcanic ash. Even if air support from the nearby Guam is impossible, we may be able to create enough of an opening to get something through on this side where the ash has spread much less in comparison.”

“B-but can we even do that? I doubt the vice president will go along with this and there is no specific law regarding the use of ballistic missiles on areas within America…”

“In all likelihood, reality will get in our way,” said Alfred with a sigh. “But given the situation, I want as many usable cards as I can get. I want to be able to move as quickly as possible in the unlikely event we are given the opportunity.”

Part 2

(November 10th – Oahu – Blackport Naval Base – From the camera in a soldier’s helmet for the command cloud)

Mercenaries in military uniforms that glittered like the surface of a CD climbed over the fence of an American naval port. Raymond Kalman was one of them. Merely getting within 20 kilometers of the base was a miracle, so setting foot inside it was unheard of. His steel-toed military boots trampled on that kind of thinking.

In fact, the mercenaries were doing more than just entering the base.

Several of the frigates and Aegis ships anchored in the port were spewing black smoke. Explosions burst out. The various explosives within the ships caught fire causing more and more explosions.

“Oh, fuck yeah!! The symbol of the stars and stripes’ power is sinking! The Aegis ships are sinking!”

“Quit the celebrating, Eater 8! This isn’t over yet!!”

Continual deep gunfire rang out. Even as Raymond frantically lowered his body down and jumped behind a toppled military tractor, he had a smile on his face. The counterattack from the American navy was continuing, but it was growing sporadic. The barrage of bullets was thin and no organized waves of attacks or coordinated attacks from multiple sides came. It was clear the American side's chain of command was in chaos. They had more or less won.

"Where is it? Where's the aircraft carrier? I thought that horrible thing with the name of a president was supposed to be here."

"It's in the South China Sea, remember? …Y'know, I'm a little worried about how well this is going."

There was of course a good reason everything was going so well.

It was difficult for Raymond to believe so suddenly. Those who denied the occult always said they would only believe what they saw with their own eyes, but things had gone well beyond that level. He was actually seeing what was happening, but he still did not want to believe it.

Some kind of giant black shadow was jumping from warship to warship.

The enemy soldiers hiding behind cover were accurately struck by lightning attacks coming from the volcanic ash.

The flames spewing from the warships changed shape and blasted through the solid buildings as if they had a mind of their own.

However, the conquest was not being carried out solely by that "unknown occult". Raymond and the others were combatting the American navy with normal bullets and explosives. The occult was weaving its way through the gaps in that stalemate and advancing as it slipped past the flying bullets and cover. A new golden ratio had been created. It was almost amusing how easily they were taking control of the battlefield.

And then…

"Don't overdo it…" said a sharp, ice-like voice in Raymond's ear.

The voice belonged to a mature woman who was wearing the same outfit as the others. Something other than her appearance clearly distinguished her from the others in the silver uniforms. She was obviously different. She was one of the ones who had brought the new power to the battlefield.

She was part of Gremlin.

She was a magician.

That woman held a power that completely rid the occult of the outdated aspect that surrounded it and allowed it to conquer even a modern battlefield.

“Our goal is to seize America for ourselves, not to destroy it. Those will be our forces in the near future, so we must not do any more damage than is necessary.”

“Wait, you’re telling us to hold back and only incapacitate them!? Are you an idiot!? Everyone on the battlefield who has a weapon and can move their trigger finger is an enemy. In war, that is all you need to take a life! How are we supposed to win if we don’t kill them when we have the chance!? Well!?” shouted back Raymond Kalman whose mood had been lifted more due to the repeated explosions and flashes of light than due to the unexpected ease of the battle.

The woman with the sharp voice softly wrapped her hand around Raymond’s hand as if to kindly stop him.

That was all it took.

With a sound like a hot wok, Raymond’s right hand and wrist turned to black ash.

“Gh…gyaaaaaaaaaaahhhhhhhhhhhh!? A-ah?”

His scream ended and changed to a noise of confusion because, after burning away so that not even the outline of the bone remained, his right hand regained its flesh and skin as if he was watching a video in reverse. After only ten seconds, his hand and even the silver glove over it were back to normal.

The pain and injury were gone, but the fear alone remained.

He was assaulted by an extreme sense of unease due to the mismatch between how he felt and what his physical state was.

Then, the woman’s sharp voice continued in a clear whisper.

“*Don’t overdo it.*”

The occult ruled the battlefield.

It did not distinguish between friend and foe.

Despite being on the side with an overwhelming advantage, Raymond and the others were tormented by a powerful sense of intimidation as if they had a cold blade pressed against their chest.

However, the strange turns of event did not end there.

“Oh, come on. Isn’t that going a bit too far to threaten an amateur?”

The next thing Raymond knew, a man in formal clothes was standing in the centre of the military dock.

Raymond had no idea how or when the man had gotten there.

A single card floated through the air like a leaf.

Someone with good eyes may have been able to see that it was the ace of swords, a tarot card from the minor arcana.

He was one of the magicians who had entered the Hawaiian Islands along with Leivinia Birdway.

He was a member of the Dawn-Colored Sunlight.

He was Mark Space.

“…”

One of the soldiers in a silver uniform, the woman with the sharp voice, checked something over her radio. The details were unclear, but *battles between magicians* were beginning on Lanai and Hawaii as well.

She sharpened her already sharp voice and said, “So you were concealed all over the place to gather information.”

“More or less.”

Like a stage magician, a large number of cards flew from the man’s right hand to his left.

Even if the American military and the Dawn-Colored Sunlight joined forces, they could not do much more than what Gremlin was already doing. The overwhelming difference lay in how many magicians each side had.

“I doubt we can completely turn this around, but we can at least buy some time even if all it allows us is a more effective retreat,” the man said.

“Do you really think a mere magician trained from a young age can reach the level of Gremlin?”

“Fortunately, I have the full minor arcana at my disposal to entertain you with.”

Part 3

(November 10th – Oahu – Main Road – Government Vehicle – From the camera to record proceedings)

The black government vehicle swerved back and forth.

Inside, the president's aide, Roseline Krackhart, looked behind with a sharp gaze as her body shook about.

A military off-road vehicle was closing in on them.

A man whose upper body was sticking up from the roof was firing countless bullets from his bullpup-style assault rifle and orange sparks were flying from the surface of the government vehicle.

"How can they do this in the middle of the public eye and in broad daylight…!?" exclaimed Roseline.

She grinded her teeth at how the situation across the entire Hawaiian Islands had completely changed over the past hour. Even then, police officers in uniform were merely watching in shock as Roseline and the military vehicle flew by.

They were in America, but it certainly did not seem like it.

Just as she was about to accept that fact, Roseline forcibly cut off that line of thinking.

As the person meant to support the leader of the nation, she could not let herself accept it.

She looked over at the policemen and yelled, "Use your radios or your cell phones or whatever. Just use my name to get all police officers to fall back!! Your bulletproof jackets can't stop rifle bullets!!"

"More importantly, what are we going to do!? We don't have an unlimited supply of gasoline!!"

"The closest base is Pearl Harbor's third marine base! We need to get inside even if we have to force our way in and get protection there. It's time we showed them the power of the world police!!"

Some objects clearly stood out within the scenery soaring by at high speed.

Countless giant black hovercrafts were landing on the beach, seeming to sully the pure white sand. Dozens of soldiers wearing silver uniforms and armored off-road vehicles poured from the hovercrafts. There were even what looked like giant containers. Those objects that crane-like "arms" were keeping balanced were the very low altitude anti-ship missile units.

(This is ridiculous. This goes well beyond the level of a terrorist group. At this scale, it's basically an army. And that would mean this is basically the beginning of a war…)

"A Gray Flag… B-but from where…?"

"There is no uniformity to their movements. Most likely, this is not a national army trained together from the beginning. This is most likely a mercenary PMC that gathered soldiers that already had a certain level of experience. But that isn't the real issue here."

"?"

"Who hired them and for what reason?"

As Roseline gritted her teeth, the government vehicle charged into the marine base.

However, she was not given the hope she had expected.

The government vehicle came to a sudden stop in front of the base. It had not been asked to stop by soldiers. No soldiers were there to stop them.

Instead, a sea of flames spread before their eyes.

The largest collection of the world police's military power in the Pacific was burning. There was no longer a defensive line around the base. Long distance bombardments had torn the long, long fence to pieces and enemy soldiers were beginning to charge in.

"They" were made up of teams of five.

They all wore matching full-body CD-like silver uniforms that erased any individuality, but the center members of those groups of five were clearly different.

In a clash of firepower, the American marines were the very best. They may lose to Academy City when it came to unique technology, but in standard fields, America clearly ruled the world both in quality and quantity.

And yet that ultimate army was being overwhelmed.

They were being overwhelmed by the mercenaries pouring into the base like an avalanche in groups of five.

The source of the mercenaries' success was those "center members".

They alone did not rely on guns. Flames blew from their hands, ice spears poured down like rain, lightning leaped about like a living being, and cracks opened in the ground that brought barricades crashing down.

Those phenomena baring their fangs against the Americans did not follow the laws of physics or chemistry.

The flames burned through supposedly unburnable steel and the lightning attacks passed through supposed insulators like concrete. That alone was not always enough to settle things, but when the marines frantically fled from behind the barricades, they were further cornered by the mercenaries' assault rifles and grenade launchers.

It was not merely normal firepower.

It was not merely the occult.

Their combination like that was something not seen even in World War III. If they had been brought together in a different way, the combination could have embodied peace greater than anything else. However, this was the complete opposite.

While Roseline sat dumbfounded, something even more baffling occurred.

A few hundred meters ahead, one of the silver soldiers looked her way. Immediately afterwards, he leaped toward her like a long throw in baseball. He landed on the hood of the government vehicle and silently held his hand out toward the car.

Something shot from his hand and before Roseline was able to comprehend whether it was fire or ice, a new figure seemed to fly in from the side and kick the silver soldier.

The new figure had white hair and red eyes. Roseline had no way of knowing, but he was the Level 5 who was said to be the strongest even in Japan's Academy City.

"Tch. There's just no end to them. Birdway! Can't you just blow them all away with some convenient magic!? This is just a waste of my battery!!"

"Y'know, magicians use up a part of their body to use magic. It isn't like it doesn't cost me anything. …That's why Gremlin joined forces with standard firepower to make up for that loss."

"A mixture of science and magic…"

"Yes, and with a different type of construction than with the Rome/Russia alliance during World War III."

A sea of flames spread out.

Everyone was fleeing in terror, but those two alone seemed set apart from it all.

The small girl casually pointed her wand at a wall of flames overrunning the base and it was swallowed up by an even larger white explosion. The mercenaries hiding behind an armored vehicle were blown away along with it. More white explosions appeared. The flashes of light easily continued through the base and reinforced the attacks from the battered Americans.

“I love doing things on a large scale like this. I think I’ll just go all out without worrying about regulating my output.”

“Don’t pretend you’re attacking discriminately. You’re getting the Americans caught up in this too,” replied Accelerator.

“Neither side will die…as long as they’ve been trained to a level higher than your average person. I’ve made sure of that.”

That was when Roseline realized something.

The American marines were being pushed back and cornered by the mercenaries. Plenty of them had been shot and were injured, but as far as she could see, there were no corpses. They were just barely managing to protect that final line.

“…Looks like we’ve picked up another god damn piece of luggage,” said the white monster sounding utterly irritated.

“Yes, but you have no intention of leaving her behind, do you, hero?”

“Don’t act like you know what I’m going to do.”

“Fine, fine. Go ahead and pretend you don’t like it. We just need to preserve enough of a military force to turn this around. For now, we need to buy enough time for the Americans to retreat and take out some of those damn mercenaries or magicians when needed.”

Part 4

(November 10th – Molokai – From a security camera at the Shrimp Motel)

Saronia A. Irivika stood in front of a motel. She was leaning against the thin door while drinking mineral water from a bottle. Her hair was wet as if she had just taken a shower. She had actually been in the sea only a half hour or so before.

She could hear the intermittent explosions and gunfire from where she was.

During World War III only two weeks before, those had been sounds heard anywhere on the globe. And most likely people all over the world including the Hawaiian Islands had decided they never wanted to hear those sounds again.

She was the only guest at the row house-like beachside motel. Even the manager had fled. As Saronia looked around, she really could not blame everyone for fleeing.

The white beach was no longer a tourist location.

It was now covered with large military hovercrafts, off-road vehicles, soldiers in silver uniforms, and container shaped anti-ship missile units. The black and moss green spread about reminded one of the stench of death. The long, narrow spear-shaped trails of smoke coming from the anti-ship missile units led to the wreckage of frigates that had managed to escape the military ports. The weapons of war on the beach were not simply installed there and they were not merely a threat. They were actually being used and were truly causing destruction. It was unmistakably the return of that war.

Saronia turned toward one of the silver soldiers walking nearby and said, “We are finally approaching the scale we wanted. Until now, the size has simply been too small to see anything properly.”

“We could have complete control of the islands in about 5 hours, but there is no need to wait. We should carry out our objective as quickly as possible.”

“I got a nice demonstration of the anti-ship missiles just now, but what is our countermeasure against submarines?”

“We are setting up torpedoes that are launched from low altitude. After flying for about 100 meters, they enter the ocean and continue from there like a normal torpedo. The model was designed to carry out antisubmarine attacks from land.”

“Make sure to strengthen your anti-personnel defenses. There is always a possibility of specialized soldiers—frogmen, I think they’re called—swimming in.”

“…Do you really think a few people can overcome our advantage? It would be like taking on a full soccer team of eleven by yourself.”

“Just be careful. Don’t forget our true objective here.”

Suddenly, the silver soldier’s cell phone started to ring.

After a short conversation, he handed the phone to Saronia.

“It’s from Knowledge 12.”

“Who’s that?”

“The one who hired us.”

“Oh, her. Hand it over then.” Saronia’s manner of speech suddenly grew much more polite. “Hello. This phase is going quite well. Are there any problems on your end?”

“The lack of any obvious problems has put me on edge, so I am nitpicking everything.”

“Oh, so there are no problems. *How is the influence on the center going?*”

“What I can do with the range of my power is going well enough, but you know very well that is not enough. That is the entire reason I am having you help.”

“It seems a little indirect to me, but it takes quite a bit of preparation time for even Gremlin to capture the United States. We just have to be patient.” Despite the gravity of what she was saying, Saronia’s tone was light. “By the way, we have the vice president, so can’t we just hurry up and say the missing president cannot continue his official duties?”

“Unfortunately, no,” said the person over the phone uninterestedly. “Do you know what Air Force One is?”

“The president’s personal jet. It has the bare minimum of equipment needed for him to carry out his duties and he can command all of the nation’s armed forces from within it in an emergency.”

“The Imperial Package that Roberto Katze has is the same. It gives him complete authority on the government cloud and allows him to send out presidential orders from anywhere. Just having him out of the White House is not enough. As long as he has the Imperial Package, he is seen as able to carry out his official duties as president.”

“Then we just have to follow the plan without searching for shortcuts. Please take care of things on your end. I suppose I will take care of some final preparations before things truly begin,” said Saronia casually. “Oh, one more thing.”

The silver soldier trembled slightly.

It almost seemed the negative emotions radiating from Saronia’s body could pass through the electronic device and reach the person that she was speaking to.

"I realize you were just trying to keep me from having the difficult task of fighting while protecting the Trigger if my position was discovered, but if you try to trick me and use me as a diversion again…*I will have your head along with the president's*."

Part 5

(November 10th – Lanai – Star Lounge Shot Bar – From security camera footage)

Kamijou Touma, Misaka Mikoto, and Roberto Katze forced open the door to an empty bar and hid inside. After the emergency landing in the transport plane, being recovered by the American military, and being attacked by anti-ship missiles, they had somehow made it to shore. Ignoring all law, machine gun-equipped off-road vehicles were brazenly patrolling the main roads.

Their clothes were covered in seawater and sand, but it was hardly the time to complain about that.

"…I should have realized it," said the president as he sat directly on the floor and placed the attaché case next to him. "I should have realized it when I was told there was someone controlling people via the occult but this person had a restriction on the number of people she could control."

"Realized what?"

"I had thought the occult had eaten into the entirety of the government. I had thought the Senate, the House, and everything else was in the grasp of some strange power, but I was wrong."

"Eh, but, what…?" stammered Kamijou.

He had thought that was precisely what Saronia had done.

That had been why the president had sensed danger, fled his own protectors, and headed out on his own. Gremlin had used people in the military and government to search for information on the Trigger and had partially used it on Kilauea.

But…

"*Only a few people were being controlled*," spat out Roberto. "It's the same as those soldiers. You can control people without relying on some strange power."

“Y-you mean…?”

“There is someone out there with the power to forcibly control people, but that does not match what is going on here. The occult is barely being used at all. *You can control people using orders without relying on all that. It’s the same thing I usually do as president*!”

His tone was oozing chagrin over the complete reversal of victim and attacker as well as the fact that his own subordinates and forces had clearly betrayed him.

However, Kamijou simply could not follow his train of thought.

What was actually happening in Hawaii…no, in the United States of America?

“Wait a second. Birdway used that automatic analysis spell to reveal what Saronia’s spell was. She truly does have a means of controlling a large number of—”

“Now I’m a complete layman when it comes to the occult,” said the president, cutting Kamijou off. “*But are you absolutely sure there is no chance the automatic analysis was intentionally led to a false result*?”

“Wait, you mean…?”

“Both this Birdway person and this Saronia person are experts in this field, so this is not a one-sided fight between a pro and an amateur. That means the odds of success are 50/50. Isn’t it possible Birdway was tricked?”

“But what about your Imperial…whatever it’s called? Didn’t you use data from there to deduce that Saronia was controlling a large number of people to gather information on the Trigger!? And the Trigger really was in that Pearl Harbor base, so—!”

“It is true that the people accessing information unrelated to their duties over the central government cloud were accessing data on the Trigger. And it is likely that information was indeed reported to Saronia’s group.” The president shook his head. “But all I saw was the flow of data. It is entirely possible they were following Saronia’s group’s orders while still in full possession of their senses.”

“But what about Cendrillon? Before we ran into you, we fought a magician named Cendrillon in the airport! In order to silence her once we caught her, Saronia controlled her in order to have her commit suicide!!”

Even as he spoke, an argument against his own words came to Kamijou’s mind.

Cendrillon herself may have been putting on an act.

They may indeed have heard Saronia's voice, but that could have been a simple communications spell. Kamijou could not deny the possibility that Cendrillon herself had attempted to kill herself in order to match what Saronia had been saying.

It was an action unthinkable of someone in their right mind, but it had successfully dulled Kamijou and the others' judgment.

It was possible Cendrillon had managed to pull it off by gathering together everything she had to give Gremlin a better chance of retaliating against them. If that was true, they would have to rethink everything from the very beginning.

"I doubt the children in the shopping mall and the pilot were cooperating with Saronia of their own free will, but it's possible that the number of people she can control is much smaller than we thought and that the orders she can give people are much simpler than we thought. In fact, the ability to control people might be nothing more than a side effect of some other attack of Saronia's. Her true power may lie elsewhere. Saronia A. Irivika's true specialty may not be controlling people."

Part 6

(November 10th – Oahu – Wreckage of Pearl Harbor's Third Marine Base – From an auxiliary control camera)

Birdway was leaning up against the side of a transport plane that was tilted to the side due to a broken axle. She was being fired on by the mysterious armed force's light machine guns. Upon hearing something from over her cell phone, she magically manipulated the papyrus in her hand, checked some information, and then threw it down to the cracked asphalt.

"…Dammit, Balbina. How could you sell me this piece of crap!?"

A woman in black clothes who Birdway had met up with when Trident had appeared said, "Her specialty is selling individual materials, so it isn't really her fault, boss. I would say the fault lies with you for not constructing your own spiritual items because you find it to be too much of a bother."

"This means I have yet another task," said Birdway, ignoring her subordinate. She lightly waved the wand in her hand and an explosion of light blew away a group of soldiers using an armored vehicle as a shield. "I need to recheck Saronia's specs. I need to analyze the method, effects, and range of the magic she uses. I need to redo the analysis I left to the spiritual item."

“Can you really finish that before you run into her at the end of all this?”

“Like always, I’ll just have to pull it off somehow.”

Part 7

(November 10th – Lanai – Star Lounge Shot Bar – From the camera in a handheld game system left on the counter)

Not all of the people had been controlled by Saronia’s magic.

Kamijou was shocked to hear President Roberto Katze say that, but he also seriously considered the possibility.

Someone was controlling the American government for their own benefit.

This person had used various methods to get politicians and government workers in their control.

However, there were some people that acted purely for their country and thus stubbornly refused to be used as pawns.

In that case…

“So whoever is really behind this uses the realistic methods as much as they can and then use magic to forcibly control the rest? So they’re eating into America both above and below the surface like that?”

“Probably.”

It was possible Saronia’s magic was not primarily a means of controlling people.

If that was the case, it had some effect that looked that way when used in a certain way.

It was similar to recklessly using the heat produced by a motor as a space heater.

However, that power was still quite a threat. It had been used to take control of an entire nation. This was especially true as the nation in question was the nation known as the world police and as the greatest power of the science side when it came to resources and economics.

And there was a single target that was both deeply involved with the American government and could not be controlled by realistic methods.

This was of course Roberto Katze.

As the president, he had sensed the occult encroaching on the government and the improper use of the Trigger. He had then done the unheard-of by heading out on his own without even the secret service guarding him. For someone trying to control the country from behind the scenes, no one could be more of a problem.

Was the enemy trying to get the president in a situation where they could control him in one way or another?

Or were they simply going to kill him so his authority would transfer to someone easier to control?

That man was the biggest target, but he had a daring smile on his face.

He said, “And in some cases, the occult could be used only as an example. You know, ‘Do what I say if you don’t want to end up like that.’ Or maybe it’s being used like an indulgence. If this rebellion is discovered and it turns out these people are going to have to take responsibility, the magician could just use her occult power to control them and make them look like a pure victim that was merely controlled.”

They did not know the specific conditions required for the magic.

Even if Saronia could only control at most a dozen or so people and could control them no better than poorly-made robots, no one could prove it.

The entirety of the US Congress would insist they had been controlled by some occult power.

All they needed was proof that some strange power was involved to some extent.

People who only believed what they saw would be tricked into thinking the tiny bit of the occult displayed before them had spread to every corner of the government.

“Eh? But…it’s the occult, right? We’re not talking about scientific esper powers here. What good will that be as a testimony?”

“Before the war, not much. But all sorts of mysterious phenomena were detected during World War III. The world is beginning to recognize the existence of the occult. Even if it is not accepted as official evidence in a trial, the people like me who are higher up than the courts and have started to come into contact with that darkness of the world might sympathize with supposed victims of the occult. In some cases, that kind of person has special measures he can take.”

“Like a presidential pardon…?”

“I doubt an emotional argument like that would be enough to convince someone, but it would be enough to help open them up to the idea. For those doing the tempting, that would be enough. After all, they have no need to actually make good on their promises.” Roberto Katze sighed. “When I think about it, it was odd that Roseline and I noticed that anything was odd. We are complete amateurs when it comes to the occult. We are not specialists like that Birdway, so would we really be able to tell at a glance whether someone was being controlled by the occult or not? I doubt it’s that simple. Magic power? Spells? I don’t know anything about those things, but I bet you need to have at least a working knowledge of it all to tell.”

“Then what *did* you notice?”

“An act. Insurance. Faking it. The ones who joined Saronia’s side via realistic methods wanted to look like they were victims of the occult in case they were ever found out. That was why an amateur like me was able to notice the change. In fact, if an expert like Birdway saw them, she may have been able to tell that they were not acting how someone being controlled would.”

“Who is it?” asked Kamijou carefully. “If there is some other enemy that is not a magician like Saronia but has joined forces with Gremlin, who is it?”

“Given the realistic means being used to infiltrate the government, they must be an enemy with a more realistic type of power,” said Roberto as he placed his attaché case on the shot bar’s counter. The lounge seemed to have a wireless LAN because the computer in the case was able to pick up a signal. “The main hint is those CD-like soldiers.”

“What country are they from?”

“Most likely, they’re mercenaries not affiliated with any country. They’re known as a PMC. They will do smaller things like bodyguard jobs, carrying out torture when regular soldiers don’t want to dirty their hands, and acting as guides in jungles or mountainous areas, but they can also act as a proper army on a division or brigade level when an independent military force is all that is needed.” Roberto Katze sighed again. “They are an effective force when hired on that level, but it’s just too expensive. You hear about tankers being attacked by pirates all the time, but you never hear about a large mercenary force being hired to act as a protective fleet, right? There are of course political issues preventing that from happening, but the ridiculous cost of hiring them is an even greater obstacle.”

“But the enemy here was able to pay.”

“The soldiers here are likely from Trident, a mercenary company that is quite active in Eastern Europe. They have D model Narwhals, they use electronic camouflage, they can deploy on such a large scale, and their movements show that a lot of them are former American soldiers. That’s the only PMC it could be. It’s one of the largest and it has an army, a navy, and an air force.”

“Just how large *is* it?”

“The estimation I’ve heard is around 50,000 soldiers. Apparently, they have been able to cut down on their numbers quite a bit with a software update for their warships.”

“That’s about the population of a small town, isn’t it!? Those soldiers are experts, right? How did they get that many people!?”

“They only use mid-career recruitment rather than going after new graduates. Also, 150,000 soldiers around the world retire every year and about 2/3 of those are not at the usual retirement age. Not to mention that those statistics are from before World War III.”

“…”

“They have plenty of reasons for quitting and life after retirement is not always kind to them. Trident has more former American soldiers than soldiers from any other nationality. I’ve been appealing for improving social security for them once they retire, but it seems some people think the continuous expenditures would put too much pressure on the economy.” The president sighed yet again. “Well, whatever the details, that is a collection of former professionals. They may be retired, but Trident puts them through a special training program to retrain them and raise their value as if they were replacing rusted gears. During World War III, NATO was thinking of hiring them, but negotiations broke down before a price could be settled on. The kind of funds needed to make a deal with them should make a noticeable flow of money in banks’ databases. No bank wants to have money flowing out of their vaults, so they would put out a warning.”

“Have you found it?”

“Unfortunately, no, but that still gives us a hint. The Imperial Package can only check things within the range of America’s power. That means whoever is behind this purposefully made the deal outside of that range so that they could not be traced.” The president typed on the Imperial Package’s keyboard, looking through even more classified information. “It had to have been someone who would gain from intervening here in America even if it costs them that much money. Someone with large amounts of money distributed outside of America. Someone with a hidden connection to Eastern European governments or banks. Someone who could hire Trident. Someone with a system that allows them to monitor our movements here in Hawaii.”

“Can you narrow it down to a single person?”

“No. First of all, there are over 30 people in America alone that are famous for having more assets than the United States. Combined multinational businesses sure are a scary thing. They aren’t divided by national lines. They clearly have a different means of division that is based around money and economic blocs,” readily admitted the president. “However, a few of the large powers that keep the US moving are influenced by a certain other person. People like Flack Kateman the car king and Douglas Hardbell the rock star are actually underneath this certain other person. A lot people could be the one behind this, but the common one at the top seems the most suspicious to me. And in that case…”

He pressed a few more keys and his answer finally appeared on the screen.

The Imperial Package displayed a single large photograph.

“Olay Blueshake the media queen. It has to be her.”

Part 8

(November 10th – Hawaii – Volcanoes National Park – From a bird watching camera)

It was strange that he had not been killed.

That was what Hamazura Shiage truly felt.

The Island of Hawaii had become a hell of lava. The giant caldera that was over ten kilometers across was filled with orange lava and some had overflowed and was flowing down the side of the mountain like spilled corn syrup.

Perhaps due to the incomplete effect of the Trigger, the lava was not headed in the direction of any towns. Hamazura and the others had not been swallowed up by the lava either, but the air around them had steamed up like in a sauna and the stench of sulfuric gases was so thick Hamazura feared it would kill him. The volcanic ash covering the sky above darkened the area like the time just before dawn. Smooth ash was constantly raining down and pieces of rock the size of fingertips stabbed into the earth as they landed.

However, a different situation was developing that made them almost forget about that twisted form of nature’s fury. In fact, Hamazura felt almost glad that he was so near the caldera that had become a lake of lava.

Beyond the ash that obstructed vision like a thin fog, gunshots and explosions rang out from the base of the short mountain. Hamazura could also see soldiers in silver uniforms dotting the ground as well as hovercrafts and armored vehicles.

"…Olay Blueshake?" he said into his cell phone as he lay down on the white ash.

He had his phone on conference call with Kamijou, Accelerator, and the rest.

He had no idea what she was doing, but he could hear explosions in the background as Birdway replied.

"She is America's media queen who went over her father's head and inherited her grandfather's network. She started expanding from there by creating a specialty news channel and established her position by buying up all the country's newspapers and the major cell phone companies. She is also famous for being the owner of major league teams and pro football teams. She is a monster of the economic world who people say would conquer the four largest sports if she only started in on basketball as well," said Birdway casually. "She is very skilled at getting fields unrelated to the information business wrapped up in the information business. By introducing an eco-friendly house that uses a computer to manage the solar power generation and the power use of the household appliances, she managed to make inroads into construction and real estate. By developing things like electric cars and a program to automatically regulate the distance between vehicles, she is now behind one of the largest producers of automobiles in the country. She was listed in a magazine article on the 100 people who keep America running, but the rampant expansion of the groups she controls swallows up even many of the others on that list."

Olay had brought even the car king and the railroad king under her control for her own purposes. She was less a queen and more an empress. Even the kings who ruled over their territories were under her control.

Birdway continued her evaluation of the ruler of that empire.

"People say she is the most likely person to become the first complete civilian to take an extended trip into space. They say she might have access to classified government information on UFOs. They say she has a hand in 30% of the world's oil. …No one has any proof of any of those things, though. In recent years, she has taken control the internet's major search engines as well as the social networking businesses, so she now has almost complete control of America's information networks."

"And there was a bit of suspicion regarding those search engines," said Roberto Katze in a calm voice. "FCE…Free Compound Eyes. That is an internet service that allowed anyone to easily setup cameras, connect them to the internet, and construct a security camera network without purchasing an expensive plan with a security company. However, white hat hackers pointed out that anyone could see the images produced by a third party's camera by only entering its registration number and, more importantly, that the major search engines that acted as the hosts could see through cameras all

across America. Of course, the Fair Trade Committee advised them to correct that issue and the service was supposedly ended…"

With a groan, Kamijou said, "So since the person behind this seems able to monitor our actions, this FCE must still be active?"

"Even if normal users can no longer use it, the FCE software must still exist on the servers. In fact, the level of control over the cameras it gives may have been heightened. Olay has also invested heavily in the three major internet providers, so if the FCE tools were installed in secret, it is possible she can control all cameras that are connected to their networks."

"Damn. That would give her access to cell phones and even video cameras and portable game systems that use Wi-Fi," added Accelerator.

"But what is this Olay after? Doesn't she already have more money than she could ever use?" asked Hamazura.

For someone with as much as her, he doubted there was anything pressuring her into straying from the proper path. Or had some other problem arisen due to the very fact that she was rich?

The president replied with a bitter tone, "Olay Blueshake is said to be the 'third house' of Congress."

"What?"

"She simply has that much influence. One's exposure in the media is directly linked to gathering votes and she holds every kind of mass media in her hand. To be honest, not even the presidential election can completely escape her influence. Even my campaign was partially backed by Olay."

"So it had already been that you couldn't win in an election if you got on the wrong side of the media queen, hm?"

"I see. She started by influencing the members of Congress whose orders influenced the military and other government organizations. Information circulates better than money, after all. And then Saronia's magic was used to control the politicians who stubbornly continued serving their country for personal ideals," commented Birdway.

"She tried to take control of the US for her own ideals by leading those who would help her toward getting elected," said Roberto Katze in a low voice. "And yet America did not head in the direction she wanted. Or perhaps it would be better to say that, at that time, the country was in a situation where she could no longer leave it to anyone else."

"?"

“World War III,” said the president simply. A short silence increased everyone’s tension. “To be honest, it’s hard to say that war went the way America wanted it to. In fact, we were more or less left out completely. It’s possible this led Olay to abandon her old methods and try to control the US in a more direct fashion.”

“And so she contacted Gremlin and Trident?” muttered Hamazura with a groan. “If you know all that, why don’t you just have her arrested?”

“Because no one knows where she is. She has a lot of enemies, after all. Her residence is officially listed as being in Washington DC, but I’d believe you even if you told me she had built a base on Mars to live in.”

With the conversation over for the time being, Hamazura hung up and put his phone back in his pocket.

Misaka Worst spoke up from next to him.

“So what are we going to do now?”

“Meet up with the boss and the president of course. We don’t gain anything by staying isolated like this.”

Kuroyoru frowned at that and said, “Are you serious? Don’t they have anti-ship missiles deployed all over these islands? If we head out in a pleasure boat, we’ll be sunk in no time at all.”

“Then we just have to get on a boat that won’t get sunk.” Hamazura pointed toward one of the landed military hovercrafts. “We just have to mix in with them somehow. If there really are thousands of them, they’ll be negligent when it comes to identifying individual soldiers. If we dress up in those CD-like uniforms, our faces will be hidden too, so they won’t even be able to tell we’re Asian.”

“Misaka thinks they would notice if we killed some of them and stole their uniforms.”

“This is the world’s largest gun country. They sell handguns at supermarkets.” Hamazura wiped sweat form his brow. “An enthusiast gun store will have equipment for guns as well. I’m pretty sure they said those soldiers were wearing a combination of equipment from various countries, but that gives us more of a chance than if it was original equipment. …And even if we can’t find the exact same models of some things, we might be able to get away with it and say we altered our equipment a bit for personal preference.”

“Hmm. You and Misaka might be able to pull that off, but someone as small as Kuroyoru-chan would look suspicious even in a military uniform.”

“Then we just need to stuff her in a bag or something. She’s small to begin with and her arms can be detached. We can make her pretty compact if we need to.”

"…Don't you fucking dare," growled Kuroyoru.

"That means the only problem is the FCE. If they see us do it, a disguise is pointless."

"How many cameras do you think there are on this island alone? It'd be impossible to take them all out."

"Once we've changed, they can't tell us apart, so we only need to destroy the cameras until then," said Misaka Worst as she pulled a nail from her pocket and started manipulating magnetism. "Right?"

♦

(Information)

Camera ID 119a0e19 not responding.

Using last known location data to search for a usable camera in the same area.

Part 9

(November 10th – Oahu – Wreckage of Pearl Harbor's Third Marine Base – From the camera to record proceedings)

As soon as Accelerator ended the call, a giant explosion occurred nearby. The Trident PMC had fired a recoilless rifle. Accelerator charged straight through the center while Birdway leaped to the side to avoid the aftereffects. From there, they headed for their next targets.

That was when presidential aide Roseline Krackhart's cell phone began to ring.

"I suppose you've found out," said a familiar female voice over the phone.

"…You have guts to call me directly after watching us this whole time, Olay Blueshake."

"It's no problem to me if all of you go on a rampage while Hawaii is isolated. America will be fully within my grasp in just a few more hours. It may seem crazy now, but once that happens, it will be like a switch has been thrown. At that point, *you will be considered the dangerous antigovernment forces*."

“Do you really think it will be that easy?”

“Oh, I do. If we can gain control of the president with the occult, that’s that. And if we can’t, I can just have him shot so his authority can be transferred to the vice president. *…And you know what has happened to the vice president, don’t you*?”

“…What is it about this country that you are willing to go to such lengths to change?”

“Knowledge 12.”

That term Olay uttered was like the words of a curse to Roseline.

“Before World War III, funds for UFO research were used to carry out 12 experiments into the occult. With the opportunities to come into contact with classified information you get from being at the president’s side, I’m sure you know of them.”

“…Those experiments were started without the president’s knowledge.”

“By any chance, do you know who their primary investor was?”

“The president found out about the plans for seven of the experiments and had them stopped in advance!!”

“Yes, but the other 5 were carried out. Two such experiments were Liberal Arts City in the Pacific and the failed report on the Gemstones with naturally occurring psychic powers from around the world. The researchers were motivated by the possibility of developing our own espers, but there was always a deeper set of laws below it all. …After what happened in the war, surely you can guess what it was I wanted to develop.”

“…”

“The United States has far too little defenses against the occult,” said Olay Blueshake with a tone filled with self-confidence. It was unclear if the confidence was real or if she was naturally using the skills she used when speaking to the public. “In reality, America was more or less left out of the war that was so deeply related to such things. That was actually quite fortunate. If the one truly behind that war had targeted the United States, the country’s leaders and military would have been slaughtered with no hope of resisting. Even in their thick shelters, strange sorcery and curses would have cut them down.”

“And that’s why you—?”

“Knowledge 12 had no clear results, but that may have been because only 5 of the experiments were carried out. If all 12 experiments had been carried out, America’s techniques might have caught up to the highest international standards.”

"So you are saying the president had no right to protect this country by working to put a stop to the experiments based on his proper sense of ethics? You were merely forcing the sacrifice onto the people of our country. Can you honestly say it is right to abduct and slice up people from around the world just because they have a certain 'disposition'!? Can't you tell you are only destroying the ideals on which the United States was founded!?"

"*I will remake this country into a theocracy*."

If representatives of the science side and the magic side had heard that statement, they might have let out a gasp.

She was talking about the conversion of a major nation.

She was talking about a clear change in the affiliation of the nation that, while inferior to Academy City in technology, was number one in the world in military might and economic power.

It was unfathomable how much of an effect that would have upon the balance of power or how much chaos it would cause.

"During the president's oath of office and during trials, the oaths are made with one's hand on the Bible. In that way and others, Protestant ceremonies have taken root at the core of this nation's government. All of the historical presidents have been Christians. By letting those sprouts bloom, this nation can be given an exceedingly strong resistance to occult attacks. *...And I have begun by bringing in Gremlin as an adviser for our occult countermeasures.*"

"The moment you used the Trigger, our international relations were ripped to shreds."

"That can be fixed with our advances into the occult."

"..."

"Why do you think I have told you all this?" asked Olay, but she continued before Roseline had time to respond. "First, the need to hide this will be gone before long. In a few hours, the United States will have been completely reformed and all this will be common knowledge not just in America but around the world. Really, I never needed to hide this." She paused for a second. "Second, I have already decided that you will die. Feel free to take that as an admission to a criminal threat."

"Kh..."

"If you cannot find anything to say in return, then our discussion is over. I will order Trident to make sure you do not suffer. I think I'll give the one who shoots you a bonus."

Olay hung up.

Roseline Krackhart remained silent for a bit.

But then…

"…Olay Blueshake," said Roseline with her head hanging down.

When her subordinate with the video camera saw that, he originally thought she was trembling in fear.

But she was not.

She was indeed trembling, but a clear smile was on her lips.

"*If you're the one behind this, I still have a way out!!*"

"Wh-what do you mean…?"

"Olay's…no, the entire Blueshake family's cornerstone lies hidden on Kauai," said Roseline quickly before grabbing a map from the government vehicle. She spread it out on the hood. "Lindy Blueshake, an eight year old girl, is the only one left to continue the Blueshake family line. For that family that values its bloodline highly and has the next in line inherit its great media network, she has irreplaceable value. Olay is sterile, so abducting that child would be the same as grasping Olay's very core!!"

"But…that's crazy!! How could she start such a large scale war in the very place her own daughter lives!?"

"Because Olay doesn't know," said Roseline with a grin. "Due to domestic violence issues, Olay got divorced, but it was her that threw the punch, not her husband. However, with her thorough ability to manipulate information and her high-priced lawyers, she managed to distort the truth. She won custody of Lindy, but the investigation afterwards deemed Olay a possible danger, so the government took Lindy away. Of course, Olay used her control of the media to make sure the public never learned of this."

"The government took her? You mean…like someone in the witness protection program!?"

"Exactly. Her name and identity were completely changed and she was given a second life elsewhere. That is why Olay does not actually know where she is. It's possible that she constructed the FCE system using the major search engines and internet providers in order to search for Lindy."

It was obvious whether she had done it out of a mother's love or in order to preserve the media network she had inherited from her grandfather.

And even with the ability to peer into the executive office of the president and into military facilities, Olay had not been able to locate Lindy Blueshake.

“Due to the hatred of the media Lindy gained due to her mother, she now lives a primitive life here in Hawaii. That may be why Olay was never able to find her.”

And that was why Roseline had a chance.

She had a final chance that lay in the gaps where the digital network did not reach.

She gave instructions to her subordinate to gather the secret service members and marines that could still be used and then smiled a thin, thin smile.

It was like the smile of a villain.

“I will show you that, if you walk down an unorthodox path, you will meet unorthodox resistance.”

Part 10

(November 10th – Lanai – Star Lounge Shot Bar – From the camera in a handheld game system left on the counter)

“Wait, wait, wait. Shit!! Dammit, Roseline, don’t go nuts just because we’re cornered!!” shouted the president as he stared at the Imperial Package’s screen and struck the hard outer shell with his palm.

Kamijou and Mikoto looked over in surprise.

“Wh-what?”

“Did the computer break?”

Noticing their questioning looks, the president clicked his tongue and said, “My aide has headed off to overcome this situation, but she didn’t discuss it with me. Olay Blueshake’s daughter is hidden on Kauai. My aide is gathering all the soldiers she can in order to abduct the girl and get an upper hand against Olay in negotiations.”

As the president continued on to explain the details of Lindy and the marines, Kamijou and Mikoto’s faces paled.

“Are you serious…? This Lindy girl hasn’t done anything! Will the soldiers really go through with that? Even if it’s an emergency, that’s a crime!” shouted Kamijou.

“Laws like that are not functioning right now and the marines are feeling fairly bloodthirsty. The enemy is moving fast and the supposedly superior American military is being pushed back. The flames of war can’t be controlled and the war front could very well reach the more populated areas. If that happens, many, many civilians will be dragged into this. They want to prevent that from happening. …*If my aide appeals to their sense of justice like that*, they will lose all guilt over kidnapping the daughter of the woman behind all this.”

A dark side of actions taken due to a sense of justice could sometimes be seen when looked at from a different angle.

And oftentimes, the one taking the action could not see that dark side.

“…How many people have agreed to go with her?”

“About 200. Most likely, they are a portion of the group Roseline has directly decided are ‘safe’ and that she trusts. Three or four divisions are stationed in Hawaii, so that is only a small minority, but we should assume they have completely left their units. To be honest, *I have no idea how far they will go for the sake of justice*.”

Troops who had lost all clear rules had now appeared.

Taking hostages to gather information was often justified, but those troops were likely acting out of hatred for Olay Blueshake the media queen. That meant the safety of her daughter could not be guaranteed. She could end up being hurt in the process of the “negotiations”. In fact, it was possible their hatred could get the better of them and they would pass the point of no return before any negotiations could even begin.

The president’s aide was raising her voice and leading them, but would she really be able to control the soldiers?

Could she say for sure that violence would not break out within the group upon spotting a family member of a hated enemy?

Kamijou thought for a bit and finally stood up from the bar’s floor.

“…You said Lindy Blueshake is on Kauai, right? Can you bring up a picture of her on that computer?”

“What are you thinking of doing?”

“We will save her,” he said simply. “If we can get to Kauai before the marines, we can help her escape. It doesn’t matter where we go, but we just have to take Lindy somewhere where the soldiers can’t find her.”

“W—w-w-wait! This Lindy girl is the daughter of the person behind all this, right? Wouldn’t fighting to save her be allying ourselves with the group conquering Hawaii!?” protested Mikoto.

“So what?” spat back Kamijou. “Olay Blueshake may be behind all this and we do need to settle things with her, but what has this girl done? It’s wrong to rob her of any guarantee of safety just because she’s related to Olay and can be readily used!!”

His words held conviction.

He was not making a decision merely because the situation led him in that direction. He was set on his own direction based on his own clear determination.

“This Lindy already had her life torn to pieces due to domestic violence and had finally managed to settle into a peaceful life. She’s only eight, but she gained that kind of rest that most people find normal only after giving up her name and the place she was born. Do we have any right to capture her, threaten her with guns and knives, and force her to stand before Olay once more? Of course not!! If you want to protect Hawaii from Gremlin, don’t forget that she is one of Hawaii’s residents too. Shouldn’t you be protecting her as well!?”

“…You’re right,” said the president with a sigh. “Since the government took custody of her, it is our duty to protect Lindy Blueshake from Olay. That means I have to fight too.”

Making the decision was easy.

However, real danger lay ahead on that path. On one side were the Gremlin forces including Saronia and Olay who were trying to conquer Hawaii. On the other were the marine forces led by the president’s aide who were trying to capture Lindy. They would be making both sides their opponents.

On top of that, the true enemy had prepared plenty of normal firearms to combat Kamijou’s right arm and their highest priority target was the president.

Those two were in no position to be worried about the wellbeing of others.

Their own lives were in much more danger than Lindy’s.

And yet…

“What’ll you do, Misaka? This is our decision. I won’t force you to go. You can just hide here to remain safe.”

What had led him to all his decisions up until then?

As Mikoto thought about that, she came to her answer.

That boy had surely done the same thing when he had saved Misaka Mikoto.

Mikoto had once been saved in the same way.

He did not stand on the side of justice.

He did not come to a decision after weighing the pros and the cons.

He merely saved people because he wanted to.

Someone who would not have been negatively impacted by it in the first place had no need to make excuses.

His answer stripped away all that was unnecessary and it held enough power to shatter the overly-complicated incarnation of justifications built from all those unnecessary things.

"…Fine, I understand. To be honest, the thought of them pressing a gun up against this Lindy girl and opening up her old emotional scars really pisses me off."

No matter how much one worried about it internally, the spoken conclusion was simple.

That boy had surely made those simple decisions time and time again.

"It isn't that girl's job to risk her life to bring peace back to Hawaii. That job lies with us."

Part 11

(November 10th – In the ocean near Kahoolawe – From UUV Cannibal Shark #443)

A large military hovercraft sailed through the ocean near the Hawaiian Islands where a network of anti-ship missiles was set up. The hovercraft itself was similar to a special kind of rubber boat, but it was much too large. In order to carry large military vehicles, its size rivaled that of a 25 meter school pool.

Two giant propellers propelled the hovercraft at over 50 kph.

The people aboard wore silver military uniforms, but they were not Saronia or Olay's subordinates.

They were Hamazura's group.

As with the ship before, this was Hamazura's first time to pilot a hovercraft, but the lack of obstacles and the fact that it floated on the surface gave him a baseless sense of security as the sudden acceleration chilled his skin. In reality, things such as reefs made even the level-looking ocean surface dangerous and any sharp rocks sticking above the surface would tear the reinforced rubber bottom of the hovercraft to pieces, but ignorance pushed Hamazura recklessly on.

As he fumbled with the ship's controls, Hamazura had his cell phone to his ear.

"…Eh? The most wanted targets are heading out into the gunfire of their own free will in order to save the daughter of one of their enemies?" he muttered in utter shock at how crazy that was.

But then he smiled.

If he was being honest, the concepts of conquering America and the media queen working with Gremlin were on just too great a scale to seem real to him.

He had finally found something small enough he could actually legitimately feel the desire to risk his life for it.

"You'll need a way to get to Kauai, right? Just wait a bit. You're on Lanai, right? We'll meet up with you there."

Meanwhile, Misaka Worst and Kuroyoru Umidori were being as indiscreet as ever.

Or rather, Misaka Worst was playing around with Kuroyoru.

"Kuro-nyaaahhn. Misaka is bored, so show me the sexiest pose you can think of!"

"Why you—! Don't take control away from me for shit like tha—gyah gyah gyah gyah!!"

"Hey, you with the mischievous look in your eyes!! Stop that. You're gonna make Kuroyoru cry again!!"

"If you try to help me like that, you're just gonna piss me off even m—gwaaaaaaaahhhhh!!"

With control of both her arms taken, Kuroyoru lost her balance and fell down on the hovercraft's deck. From there she (unwillingly) carried out a completely impractical motion.

When Misaka Worst and Hamazura Shiage saw it, a kind look entered their eyes.

"…That's the first time Misaka has seen someone actually say 'uffun'. 25 points."

“You may never shut up about darkness and all that crap, but you’re surprisingly pure. 30 points.”

“H-how…how dare you mock me…!!” said Kuroyoru while grinding her teeth, but she was simply too poorly matched with Misaka Worst.

The electricity esper in question casually glanced over toward the ocean surface and said, “Do you think we actually fooled them?”

“Of course not,” spat out Kuroyoru Umidori in response with her face still beet red. As she also looked toward the ocean surface, she stared straight into the camera’s lens. “They’re letting us go in order to lead them to their weak point.”

Part 12

(November 10th – Oahu – Wreckage of Pearl Harbor’s Third Marine Base – From an auxiliary control camera)

Most of the base had been destroyed, it was barely functioning, and the soldiers stationed there had finished evacuating.

Meanwhile, Saronia and Olay’s Trident PMC must have decided they would gain nothing by attacking any further. They had quickly gone off to target another base.

“…Tch. The aide has disappeared, too.”

“So she’s headed off to attack an 8 year old girl. Turns out she wasn’t worth saving.”

Accelerator and Birdway had regrouped after that round of fighting was over.

They understood the general situation from speaking to Kamijou and the others over the phone.

Leivinia Birdway rested her wand on her shoulder and smiled thinly.

“However, this could be our chance.”

“…”

“Don’t look at me like that. You always get so motivated when it comes to little girls, don’t you?” She shrugged. “Even now, Olay Blueshake is listening to our conversations.

That means she is sure to make her move. She will try to get there before our group or the president's aide and her marine volunteers manage to reach Lindy."

"But I doubt the media queen will head out directly. In fact, is she even in Hawaii?"

"If she's somewhere we can reach, then she's quite an idiot," said Birdway simply before spinning around her wand. "That is why, as one of the main leaders, Saronia will be commanding a portion of the troops in order to collect Lindy. They would never focus all the troops on that. After all, Hawaii is the largest collection of military forces in the Pacific and they need to focus on taking care of that. However, the troops led by Saronia – as well as Gremlin in general – will not necessarily do as Olay wishes."

"…Really?"

"According to Kamijou Touma's report, Saronia herself was put in quite a bit of danger during the transporting of the Trigger because she was used as a diversion without being told. She will now have some distrust for Olay. It's only natural that she will want a trump card she can use to conveniently control Olay."

"But isn't Gremlin's plan to conquer the United States based on Olay's economic power and supplemented by Saronia's magic?"

"To them, this 'war' in Hawaii is nothing more than part of their preparations. What they truly want to do is take control of America, create a situation in which they can manipulate things at will, and make sure that situation lasts. That means they must work together for a long period of time. Right now, they both want to gain the upper hand at this early stage even if it comes with some risk."

"But that also means we only have to take out just one or the other of Saronia and Olay. If either one could accomplish this without the other, they would never have joined together in the first place. So now we just have to defeat Saronia when she shows up on her own for Lindy."

"Yes, that would cause their plan to fail. We would win. As such, I'm sure you know what we must do."

"…Hm. Even when I leave Academy City, I end up having to clean up all the shit."

"Just be honest and call it saving people's lives, hero."

CHAPTER 5

For What Purpose Should That Strength Be Used?

The_Old_Glory.

Part 1

(November 10th – Kauai – From a tide level monitoring camera)

Kamijou Touma, Accelerator, Hamazura Shiage, Misaka Mikoto, Misaka Worst, Kuroyoru Umidori, Leivinia Birdway, and Roberto Katze reached Kauai on the hovercraft Hamazura had supplied.

"It looks like the marines aren't here yet."

"Unlike with us, Olay has no reason to let them get here. They must be trying to find a way past the anti-ship missiles deployed across the islands."

"But Saronia will have already started to move. In all likelihood, a PMC unit was sent to Kauai when this began. They would have been only a single radio call away from taking action," said Accelerator.

"Trident and Saronia do not know the exact location of Olay's daughter. They would likely find her eventually if they performed a thorough search, but they probably want any hints they can get. They probably only just now got the order now that we have actually made it here."

"That means it's just us and them for now," said Mikoto as she brought her hand to her chin. "I'd rather we found this Lindy girl before the marines arrive and make this more complicated. You know where she is, right? Where is she exactly?"

Birdway put her index finger up to her lips and said, "As I said before, Olay and Saronia do not know where Lindy is. Seeing how they are legitimately trying to crush the marine force, they are likely planning to find her by monitoring our movements. …Of course, with that many soldiers, they *could* always just resort to a search. In the end, this means that our movements *will act as the trigger that sends them to Lindy*."

"…"

"Prepare yourself before heading on. To save her, we must first bring danger to her. Act only once you have accepted that cruelty. Understand?"

Birdway looked everyone in the eye in turn, not just Mikoto.

After no one voiced any objections, she turned toward the president.

Holding the Imperial Package, Roberto responded while knowing full well that the unseen enemy was listening in.

"Lindy Blueshake is at Sunny Watcher 44-19. …The trigger has been pulled. It's time to start the firefight with that occult-supplemented PMC."

♦

The heroes began to move.

They were moving to save Lindy Blueshake. They were moving to lure out Saronia A. Irivika.

The plan to theocratize America had begun in Hawaii and would spread to the entire United States as well as the science side as a whole if left unchecked. The final battle to decide its fate was beginning.

♦

(Unknown Time – Unknown Location – Unknown Camera ID – From footage with altered video and audio)

Olay Blueshake wore a gaudy suit that fit her figure so well it clearly could not have been sold just anywhere and it had actually cost about the same as a midsized passenger jet. She also wore a ten-gallon hat and spurred boots that did not match the suit in the slightest. She did not wear them out of her own tastes or for any practical reason. They were purely to give a certain image to the public. The United States had always been fond of the frontier spirit. That image was a defensive measure against the common criticism those in the internet business received of being "too radical".

She was in a high class hotel room…or so it looked. It could have been somewhere completely different and merely designed to look that way. It could have been deep underground, in a military facility, on a luxurious ocean liner, or in a large airplane. The available information was so scarce that the breadth of speculation spread out infinitely.

A young male secretary poured whisky into a glass and asked her, “Is there really any need to film yourself?”

“It is important to view everything objectively. Putting myself in the finder helps remind me that I am a piece on the game board as well.” Olay grabbed the glass proffered to her. “Being in a safe area makes one forget fundamental facts. It makes a mere piece think she is the player. …I mustn’t be so conceited. The game board that is the world is fully connected, so someone can reach any other part of it eventually if they put their mind to it. Safety is much less fuel efficient than you would think.”

Despite what she said, her calm words declared that she was confident in her own safety. Someone in a truly dangerous situation would force themselves to hold an optimistic view to help keep a stable heart.

The secretary was well aware of that, but he did not point it out.

“I see you managed to fix the compatibility between the FCE and Trident’s electronic camouflage.”

“That camouflage is so disliked because it is so ineffective.”

“What will you do with Miss Lindy?”

“I will have her brought back to me.” Olay’s tone stiffened there and there alone. “The Blueshake media network began as a collection of information on gold veins during the old gold rush. The network was made public during my grandfather’s generation, but no matter how far the types of businesses it encompasses have expanded, it must be passed down through the Blueshake bloodline.”

“I doubt Saronia A. Irivika and the Trident PMC will carry this out as you asked them to.”

“There is a reason they are able to think those unnecessary things and take those unnecessary actions for unnecessary gain. …That reason is leeway. Because the conquest of the Hawaiian Islands is going so well, they are able to think about more complicated and troublesome things like taking detours that open up more opportunities for them.”

“And what will you do about this?”

“I will of course make sure they cannot think about those more complicated and troublesome things. I will corner them, rob them of their leeway, and make sure they can only think of the simple things. What is the most fundamental thing for a soldier to do? Isn’t it to work at their job to the point that they can no longer think?” As Olay spoke, she typed on her thin, supple fingers raced across her computer’s keyboard. “And so I must have Miss Roseline and her marine volunteers drive Saronia and Trident into a corner.”

“Will they really act based on information received from us?”

“I will not be simply giving an order. I will merely leave them with a hint. If they think they came up with the idea on their own, they will jump at the chance to carry it out.”

Part 2

(November 10th – Kauai – Mountainous Area in Anahola – From an in-vehicle camera)

Hamazura Shiage, Leivinia Birdway, and Roberto Katze were driving through a mountainous area on the eastern side of Kauai. They were of course using a stolen vehicle.

Apparently, Lindy Blueshake was in an area in northern Kauai known as Napali Coast. Kamijou and the others had landed on the southeastern side of the island and the centre of the island was too mountainous, so they had to circle around the island to reach Lindy. This required them to follow the coastline where Trident had their anti-ship missiles set up.

Due to that difficulty the terrain presented, Hamazura and the others had split into a few groups that were heading for Napali Coast using different routes. Hamazura’s group was taking the route that headed counterclockwise around the island’s circumference.

The president stared out the window and at the coast spreading out behind the mountain surface. He narrowed his eyes at the sight of mercenaries setting up various pieces of equipment.

“Even if they are overlooking us to a certain extent to find Lindy, that’s only for the convenience of those at the top. If they actually spot us, a firefight will be unavoidable.”

“The one piece of luck is that your aide and the marine volunteers were slowed down,” muttered Birdway in the backseat.

While driving, Hamazura frowned and said, “Don’t you have that backwards? They’d clearly end up fighting Gremlin and Trident, too. If the other two sides are fighting each other, wouldn’t that make things easier for us?”

“You’re the one that has it backwards. They’re only overlooking us because Olay and Saronia have control. If the marines made it to Kauai and chaos broke out, those bosses might lose control of their troops. Without a power working to give us uninterrupted use of the roads like this, we would be stuck in the middle of an unthinkable melee.”

“Not good,” muttered Roberto. He was still staring out the window. “Roseline has made her move. Boy! Stop this car now! We’re about to get pushed to the side!!”

“Ahn?”

With a confused expression, Hamazura looked over in the same direction as the president…and then frantically slammed on the brakes.

The tires screeched as they scraped against the asphalt and an instant later even that noise was wiped away.

This was due to a few dozen air-to-surface missiles fired from out in the ocean.

Twenty cutting edge stealth fighters came soaring only a few dozen centimeters off the ocean surface at over 400 kph. They had likely come from Oahu. The eruption of Kilauea had supposedly made aircraft unusable, but that restriction was being circumvented by flying at extremely low altitudes.

However, it was not entirely accurate to call what they were doing “flying”.

In the spot where wheels normally were, the fighters had ski-like floats forcibly attached. By sacrificing aerodynamic and stealth functionality, they could now “grasp” the ocean surface. The fighters were not merely flying just off the surface. It was more like they were being pushed forward as they floated on the surface.

Trident had built their defenses out of anti-ship missiles, so they could not deal with invaders that could move so quickly.

The fighters flew past the few anti-ship missiles that were fired and then fired deadly missiles of their own at the coast.

An orange wall appeared for about twelve kilometers across the white beach.

The wall was created from explosive flames and shockwaves.

Despite being more than five kilometers away from it, Hamazura’s car skidded disconcertingly to the side.

His seatbelt must have constricted his lungs along with his ribs because Roberto Katze let out a gasp from the passenger seat.

“…Dammit Roseline!! Do you not realize I’m here!? Or do you know but you’re firing anyway!?”

“This isn’t over. Now that the anti-missile network has been sealed off, something else will be coming to finish this!” warned Birdway.

And that was precisely what happened.

With their initial bombing over, the stealth fighters circled around without landing. From behind them, landing ships plowed onto the beach. The ships were equipped with hydrofoils and they could move at 100 kph. The steel ships slid up onto land all at once like beached whales.

Doors on the back opened and soldiers poured out.

The soldiers were equipped differently than Trident. They used the proper equipment of that nation. A group of over 150 such soldiers invaded Kauai.

“This is finally coming to a head,” muttered Hamazura as he turned the key once more to restart the stalled car. “In an uncontrollable battlefield, a three-way battle is beginning over Lindy Blueshake.”

Part 3

(November 10th – Kauai – Blue Energy Gas Station – From a rearview camera in an abandoned sedan)

He had failed to escape.

Weck Lunasand was hiding at an abandoned gas station. He was breathing heavily while crouching behind one of the vending machines on one side of the building.

Only 70 cm away but on the other side of the vending machine, he could hear countless people passing by. He could only hear the sound of feet on white sand. If he was found, he was done for. His hand was not on his chest, but that thought made him overly conscious of his heartbeat.

The company ID hanging from his neck said he was a children’s surfing instructor.

He had stuck with his professional ethics too much and had failed.

He had failed at life.

Immediately after the commotion had originally broken out, Weck had piled the children in his class into his SUV and headed for an abandoned building in Chinatown. The building held nothing more than dust and roaches, but he knew it had a civilian nuclear shelter. The room was only a few metres across, but it was enough to hide in. A highly polished resort hotel filled with expensive things was one thing, but he doubted anyone would force their way into an old, run-down building like that. All they had to do then was close the thick door and wait it out.

But then one of the children had told him one of them was missing.

“I should’ve just abandoned him. Dammit. Two thousand dollars a month isn’t worth this.”

Despite having left that safe area, he had not found the missing child.

Soldiers that glittered like CDs were all over the place with the kind of assault rifles often seen in movies that were shaped a bit like hacksaws. That had made it difficult to go anywhere. Their equipment was different from the American soldiers he saw in bars or undergoing public training. And if they were not American soldiers, *who were they*? About all he could figure out was that it would be bad if they spotted him. They had not found him yet, but it was only a matter of time. Every route was already blocked.

“…”

He recalled the weight in his right hand.

It was a .38 revolver that had been in the dashboard of the sedan he had deserted in front of the gas station. However, he doubted he could accomplish anything with it. A gunshot would be like telling a pack of wild dogs where some meat was. Also, he was unsure he could hit with the first shot and he was at a gas station. He could not deny the possibility that there was enough evaporated gasoline floating around that gunfire would cause a giant explosion.

The gun was more a good luck charm than anything.

He needed it to ensure he did not panic and do something stupid.

“At any rate, I have to survive this somehow. I need to get out of here. Wait, there’s gasoline here. If I put it in some kind of container and set that off, I can draw their attention elsewhere. There’s nothing wrong with it if it’s to save my life.”

He may have been speaking out loud in order to forcibly get himself to accept what he was saying. In other words, even then, Weck Lunasand’s softheartedness remained.

And a further trial remained for that softhearted man.

He heard the cry of a small boy.

Weck frowned, leaned back against the vending machine, and covered his face with his hands.

“Shit…Is that Steve…!?”

Steve was the last student that had gotten separated from the group.

Weck crawled forward along the oil-smelling concrete in order to peer out from behind the corner of the vending machine. He spotted a dozen or so men and women walking across the white beach. They were being led by four or five silver soldiers with rifles.

Amid that group was a single ten-year-old boy.

The difficulty level had just shot up.

The same question crept up in the back of his mind as back in the shelter: should I abandon him or not?

“What can I even do…?”

His breathing grew even more erratic. He felt a great pressure in his gut. However, that pressure was not simply fear for his life. It was caused by his decision to leave another human being to die.

“That’s it. I’ve done enough. For only $2000 a month, saving seven of them is commendable. I don’t need to get greedy, right?”

After realizing he was saying it out loud, Weck stopped breathing for an instant.

Saying it aloud was his ritual for forcibly getting himself to accept what he was saying.

That meant he did not actually accept it.

“…I’d just get myself killed…”

After saying that one last thing that he could not accept, Weck Lunasand looked around the area.

He was at a gas station. There was tons of gasoline there. He could divide it up into small containers. The wind would carry the evaporated gasoline that was scattered about the beach. Depending on how he used it, he might be able to temporarily toy with the silver soldiers.

Just as methods started entering his mind, he heard a slight metallic noise.

One of the silver soldiers had approached without Weck noticing and he held the barrel of his rifle against the back of Weck’s head.

It had been a mistake to peer out.

The situation had been worsened by the fact that he held that handgun. The soldier had no way of knowing he was only using it as a good luck charm.

“Dammit. I don’t want to die…!!”

He spoke out loud, but he was not about to convince the soldier of anything.

Just as Weck Lunasand squeezed his eyes shut, he heard a loud crash.

The man holding the assault rifle had suddenly flown a few meters to the side.

For an instant, Weck thought the man had been hit by a dump truck.

Even after turning around and seeing it with his own eyes, he could not believe that the man had actually been struck by a careless kick of a slender leg.

The great crash of the silver soldier’s body destroying a vending machine brought all attention on that spot. However, the one who had thrown the kick did not seem to care.

He had white hair and red eyes.

The impression he gave was more that of a beast than of a human.

“…What a fucking pain.”

Two girls accompanied him. They both had the same face, but the look in their eyes was different. The middle school aged one had a proper look, but the older one had the look of a criminal on a wanted poster.

Speaking to the white figure, the middle school aged girl said, “We can start here. Once we hack into Trident’s command cloud, we can destroy their defensive network of anti-ship missiles. Then naval reinforcements can be called in. I have a lot I want to say to you, so I’d rather not get bogged down here.”

“I intend to repay my debt to the clones, but I have no intention of apologizing to you. You aren’t conveniently forgetting that you too were one of the ones responsible for that experiment, are you?”

“I of course intend to make up for that, but it pisses me off to hear it from the poster boy of the experiment.”

While creating an extremely threatening atmosphere, the two of them slowly headed for the beach. They were of course headed there to rescue the tourists being held at gunpoint.

Weck was completely taken aback and the girl with the mischievous look in her eyes winked and said, “Basically, those two tsunderes are saying everything is going to be okay.”

With countless explosions, two monsters ruled the battlefield.

They were the #1 and the #3.

Those two Level 5s had singlehandedly traversed the battlefields of World War III and now a tornado of destruction surrounded them.

Part 4

(November 10th – Kauai – From a helmet camera for the command cloud)

Saronia A. Irivika was aboard a hovercraft. Lindy was conjectured to be in Napali Coast and its more inaccessible areas were difficult to reach with a normal vehicle. It was much faster to approach by sea.

Trident had been instructed by their client to put together a team to recover Lindy, but Saronia's inclusion in that team was not in line with the client's wishes.

The Trident member in charge of piloting the hovercraft spoke to Saronia.

"We will focus on stopping the other forces. Can we leave apprehending the target to you?"

"That would be for the best. With professional killers like you, a threat could end up leading to quite a bit of bloodshed."

"…Our client would kill us. Do you know who hired us?"

"Olay Blueshake. But that really does not matter," said Saronia readily in the sea breeze. And she did not stop with just that one outrageous statement. "Gremlin does not matter either. Of course, Trident does not matter. Nor does the theocratization of the United States or the collapse of the balance between the magic side and the science side. None of it matters."

"O-our conversation is being monitored by the FCE…"

"Yes, I'm sure she's listening in. But it's the same for you, isn't it? Trident has its own objective and you have your own objective. In the end, everyone decides what to give precedence based on what benefits us personally."

As she spoke, Saronia pulled a rectangular plastic pill case out of her pocket.

In the many partitioned spaces were seeds of trees.

“My country was torn apart by World War III.”

“…”

“And yet there were a few countries and areas that benefitted from that war. The primary examples are Academy City and the United States. On top of that, they are remaking my country as they see fit by controlling the flow of money being sent in the name of war restorations.”

“I-I had heard it was mostly construction of infrastructure…”

“Winter is coming. They have requisitioned the natural gas pipelines, claiming it is so they can repair them, but they are delaying that work for the sake of clearly unnecessary construction. They know full well that heating is a lifeline there in the winter, but they are having people swear their loyalty.” A thin smile appeared on Saronia’s face. “We can’t let them do that, now can we?”

Her tone held no thorns and it even had the kind of sweetness one used to entice the opposite sex, but the veteran Trident soldier realized he was trembling.

“That is why I will return things back to the way they should be.”

She took one of the seeds from the pill case and placed it on her palm. She then rolled it around, smelled it, and bit into it with her back teeth.

With a look in her eye like she had remembered something, Saronia continued speaking.

“It is only natural for Academy City and the United States to pay up. It is only natural for that money to truly act in Russia’s favor. Since they refuse to make the initial preparations, I will force them to. After all, they made so much money during that war. Having to give a little back to those they used as a stepping stone seems like an appropriate punishment to me.”

Normally, Trident might have tried to stop Saronia with military force in order to protect their client’s interests.

But they could not.

Despite being accustomed to creating corpses, the mercenaries were frozen in place out of fear of the strange occult and that girl who could freely wield it.

“Oh, and Olay Blueshake. I seem to recall your name being on a list of people who made all sorts of money during that war.”

She had never intended to simply obey.

Magicians tended to give the one precedence over the all. That nature suddenly showed itself.

As she continued on in search of Lindy Blueshake, ferocious intent was displayed on Saronia's face.

Part 5

(November 10th – Kauai – Napali Coast – From UAV Lesser Emperor #300)

Napali Coast was registered as a state park, but the areas deeper into the park could only be reached by heading along a few kilometers of saw tooth-like cliffs where no normal car could pass. A log house stood in that deep cliffy area.

Harzak Lolas, a large man who towered over two meters tall, was tending to a terraced vegetable garden he kept near the log house. It had originally been to grow food, but chaos had taken over ever since its proper owner had started growing flowers in it. Harzak was not growing food in it either. Unbefitting of his large body, he was replanting a small seedling from a planter into the garden with delicate movements of his hands.

Suddenly, the log house's door opened.

Without turning around, Harzak spoke to the girl who had to stretch up and turn the knob with both hands.

"If you aren't going swimming, you don't need to wear a swimsuit."

"It's hot. The power generators and the solar panels aren't enough to keep the air conditioner on all day. And it'll be hot tonight, so I have to save up power in the batteries. Also, I'm gonna go fishing again this evening."

That conversation was a custom of theirs, so Harzak was not actually trying to fix the girl's habit. He changed the subject and said, "Your textbooks are in the mailbox."

"You're the one that brings the mail, so you don't have to just leave it in the mailbox, Harzak."

“This is your house, Lindy. I am only here to help out. More importantly, you need to check the textbooks to make sure none are missing. I’ll make that long trip as many times as it takes.”

“…I don’t like textbooks.”

“No one likes studying.”

“I’d rather listen to your stories.”

“Unfortunately, those won’t be of any use to you,” Harzak said as he adjusted the soil where he had just transplanted a small seedling. “Will you gain the knowledge of a citizen of the United States or of a native Hawaiian? Both have value. I don’t make the cut on either count. You can tell just by hearing my name. My parents did a poor job of naturalization, so I don’t have a good grasp of the native language or culture. And yet I can’t get used to life in modern America either.”

“Mhh…” The girl named Lindy puffed out her cheeks. “But I still like your stories.”

Having said what she wanted to say, the girl grabbed the textbooks wrapped in plastic and headed back into the log house.

Harzak truly thought she was a good, pure girl, but that was exactly why he could not let an idiot like himself influence her too much.

He had heard that a true king still lived somewhere in the Hawaiian Islands, but he had never even seen a hint of it being true. Was this king in some unexplored land or had he blended into the cities? Harzak had lost even the slightest desire to search him out and become a member of his kingdom. He was sick of running out of strength partway up the mountain and heading back down.

After finishing his work on the garden, Harzak stood up, wiped sweat from his face with his arm, and looked up into the blue sky that was thinly covered by volcanic ash.

It was rare for the ash to make it all the way to Kauai. He started to wonder if he should cover the garden in plastic if it was going to continue for much longer.

That was when he noticed something odd.

He saw what looked like a twenty or thirty cm long dragonfly.

But that was not what it was.

It had a body made of polycarbonate and wings made of ABS resin, it moved around using a motor, and it was equipped with a transmitter and a camera, so it could hardly be called a normal dragonfly.

"…A lens…A camera…" muttered Harzak.

He then recalled why Lindy Blueshake was living in a place like that. He recalled what it was she utterly loathed. He recalled why government workers had introduced her to that "unexplored land" that lacked any and all presence by the mass media.

"Not good… Lindy, Lin—!!" Harzak started yelling as he turned back toward the log house, but a hand reached from behind him and covered his large mouth.

He had no idea when, how, or from where someone had gotten there.

Still having no idea what was going on, Harzak was pushed down to the side of the garden as if his opponent had used some kind of magic trick. Due to the glare of the sun, he could not see his attacker's face, but the silhouette was enough to tell him he held a handgun.

Harzak would be shot.

He felt a pain like his heart was bound in something like a kite string, but the sound of a gunshot never reached his ears.

He had no idea what was going on.

Bit by bit, he realized that the attacker sitting atop him was trembling, that the attacker had a transparent spear pressed up against his throat, and that the owner of the spear had approached silently from behind the attacker.

An Asian boy and girl stood there.

The boy had spiky hair and the younger girl had a nasty look in her eyes that made her incomparable to Lindy.

They started saying things in Japanese.

"You're from Trident, aren't you?" The speaker continued without waiting for the attacker to respond. "Would you rather take a nitrogen spear or a fist?"

For an instant, the attacker looked down at the handgun he was pointing at Harzak and then quickly turned it toward the two Asians.

However, before he could actually use it, the girl's spear sliced off the barrel of the handgun as well as the front of his helmet. In the next instant, the boy's fist slammed into the attacker's face. The silver soldier collapsed backwards and the boy spoke to him in Japanese.

“You should thank me. I actually saved your life.”

“I did most of the work. All those ones collapsed over there were my doing,” the girl said.

“Kuroyoru takes everything too seriously. If I wasn’t here to stop her, she probably would have taken off all of your heads.”

“Where are the others? Are we the first ones here?”

Harzak could not understand what they were saying, but four other silver soldiers lay collapsed in the direction the girl had pointed.

As Harzak lay there in shock, the boy looked over toward the ocean that was visible beyond the cliff and said something.

Harzak could not understand his words, but a strange phenomenon followed.

The phenomenon came from the right hand of the girl with the nasty look in her eyes.

The motion was similar to typing on a keyboard, but it was as fast as an electric sewing machine. The repeated sound of her fingers striking the garden’s fence came together to form English words that sounded like someone accurately reading from a textbook.

“The troops Olay Blueshake hired have begun to move in order to take Lindy back. If you are the one charged with being her guardian, you should more or less understand the situation. Do not let her fall into Olay’s hands. Take Lindy with you and flee!”

“Wh-what…?”

Harzak was utterly confused, but the girl was not about to let him argue.

“Hurry! They are coming up from the ocean!! You have no time!!”

Harzak looked over and saw a large hovercraft approaching the base of the cliff that looked like a saw blade.

However, he did not have time to just leisurely watch.

A few of the silver soldiers clinging to the cliff were pointing bullpup-style assault rifles their way. As high-pitched gunshots rang out, the boy and girl lay down on the ground and Harzak frantically made his way into the log house.

“What’ll we do now?” asked the girl.

“We have to at least let Lindy and her guardian escape. Then we just have to fight until we can stop Saronia.”

“You certainly sound calm for someone up against assault rifles, Mr. Japanese.”

“To be honest, I think I’d be too scared to do anything if they had handguns. However, this is on such a huge scale that it just doesn’t seem real.”

The two heard the noises of Harzak and Lindy escaping from the backdoor of the log house. After making sure those two were gone, they started to circle around to the side of the house to use it as cover.

But then the boy suddenly smelled flowers.

Immediately afterwards, the boy’s left arm suddenly *dropped*.

It dropped straight down. Limply. The joint was still connected, but it dropped down and swayed with no strength in it. He could not bring any strength to the arm from the fingertips up to the shoulder. He felt no pain, heat, or cold. He also felt an odd numbness on the left half of his face. He was unsure what expression was displayed there.

“Gh!?”

He frantically grabbed his left arm with his right hand, but there was no response. It was apparently not something that could be simply fixed with Imagine Breaker.

“My left arm…?”

“What? I’m not detecting any kind of chemical weapon,” said the girl while *making an action with her right hand as if she were gently grasping something*.

The girl must have come to the idea from the trembling of the skin on his face, but the boy was half sure it was something else.

Magic.

They were up against users of magic that had modified spells so they would work against a certain boy and make him suffer.

Still holding his unnaturally limp left arm, the boy looked back toward the cliff from around the outer wall of the log house. He spotted a familiar face among the silver soldiers.

“Saronia A. Irivika!!”

Part 6

(November 10th – Kauai – Northern Off Limits Area of Napali Coast – From UAV Lesser Emperor #210)

The deeper areas of Napali Coast were made up of repeated saw tooth-like cliffs and normal cars could not traverse the dangerous paths.

But nothing was without exception.

For instance, there was such a thing as a monster truck.

In Japan, radio-controlled toys were often more well-known than the actual trucks. With four exceedingly large tires and suspension as thick as pillars, they were the ultimate off road vehicles. As the vehicle flew easily through the air while using forty-five degree slopes as jumps, it truly seemed to live up to its name as a monster.

It was of course stolen.

They had borrowed it from some tourists who had fled in the middle of a barbecue party.

“There she is!! It’s the girl from the picture! Why isn’t she waiting in the log house?” shouted Hamazura Shiage as he drove the stolen vehicle over a steep slope with a roar of the engine.

In the passenger seat, the president’s face had paled to the point it looked like he could barf at any second. In the backseat, Birdway was arrogantly sitting with her arms crossed and without a seatbelt while experiencing the shaking of the truck defying gravity.

Despite Hamazura’s complaint, finding the target so soon made things easier.

Hamazura started to bring the monster truck around toward Lindy and the large man pulling at her arm as they escaped along the dangerous path.

Suddenly, Hamazura heard a crash and his vision turned pure white.

Or rather…

“The windshield…!?”

A soft, ball-shaped projectile used for riot suppression had been fired from a grenade launcher. Instead of a piercing shock, the force of the impact had spread out across the windshield.

With his vision cut off, Hamazura immediately slammed on the brakes, but he realized an instant later that the attacker had been hoping for precisely that.

“Shit…not good! Get out, Hamazura!! Even if you speed up now, we won’t make it in time!!”

Roberto Katze half-rolled out of the passenger seat and Hamazura followed suit after turning the key. First, the windshield was completely shattered by gunfire and then the scattered gunfire focused on the president and chased after them. Rolling along the sharp ups and downs atop the cliff, Roberto quickly reached cover.

In fear of accidentally shooting Lindy, the silver soldier used the stock of his bullpup-style rifle to beat down the large man with her instead of shooting him. He then grabbed the girl’s arm and threw her into the backseat of the monster truck. He climbed in the driver’s seat and turned the key that was still in the ignition.

Immediately afterwards, the silver soldier’s body bent backwards with a crackling noise.

“That’s what happens when someone has messed with the ignition and the ground,” said Hamazura as he calmly returned to the truck and opened the door. “No matter how much you train, you can’t win in a fight against a high amperage, 300 volt current.”

Repeated primitive sounds of violence could be heard.

Once the silver soldier could truly not move, Hamazura took his handgun and assault rifle and tossed him from the driver’s seat. Hamazura undid the trick he had applied to the vehicle and turned the key like he owned it.

A bit later, the president climbed into the driver’s seat, turned around, and got a shocked look on his face.

“Miss Birdway! You didn’t escape!?”

“There was no need,” said Birdway simply as she lightly swung about a dagger she had seemingly pulled out of thin air.

Having been thrown in next to Birdway, Lindy Blueshake was leaning away and grabbing onto the driver’s seat headrest out of fear of the blade.

“U-um, Mr. President!!”

“Oh!! F-finally…Finally I meet someone who recognizes me as the president at first glance!”

“D-don’t get tears in your eyes like that! U-Um…The thing is…!!”

“Huh? But I thought this girl hated the media and didn’t read the newspapers or watch TV. How is she so familiar with how you look?” cut in Hamazura.

For someone reason, Roberto puffed out his chest and said, “Back when suspicions about the FCE were being investigated, Olay Blueshake got some help from a pain-in-the-ass group of lawyers and just barely managed to escape all legal responsibility, but that was when the household environment Lindy was in came to light. It was basically a crazy form of a gifted children’s program. It was the kind of thing where the parent shows her love by insisting her kid lives out the ideal she sees in their head and so she puts all the blame on the kid and says the kid betrayed her when it doesn’t work out exactly right. Roseline said it would be difficult to interfere and that it would have a major effect on how the news reports things about me, but I’m just too much of a dandy, so I had to help her no matter the cost. Ain’t I great?”

“So this isn’t the first time she’s met you. Of course, she recognizes you!”

“Let me get to my point! Please!! What is going to happen to Harzak!? He’s getting smaller and smaller back there!!”

“Girl, I understand how you feel, but you and I are their targets.” The president grabbed her small shoulder and pushed her back into the seat. “I promise I will return you to him, but right now it is safest for him if you are not with him.”

“…”

Lindy Blueshake shrank down into the back seat.

She was not lost in confusion because she did not know what was going on.

She had the face of someone who was seeing the terrible situation they had seen coming.

“…Has my mom gotten this close already?”

“Yes,” the president admitted. “The time to overcome her is approaching fast.”

Part 7

(November 10th – Kauai – Napali Coast – From UAV Lesser Emperor #300)

With his left arm unusable, Kamijou Touma hid behind the log house along with Kuroyoru Umidori. Even then, the mixed unit of Trident and Gremlin was continuing to land.

The silver soldiers disembarking from the hovercraft by the cliff easily moved about in that dangerous area and aimed their bullpup-style assault rifles toward Kamijou and Kuroyoru.

Along with a loud noise, the logs making up the building were torn into by the bullets.

“That #1 is completely fucking useless! He isn’t pulling any of them away from us! What the hell are we supposed to do? At this rate, they’ll have circled around behind us before long!!” spat out Kuroyoru.

“A collection of ordinary firepower, hm?” Kamijou looked down at his unmoving left hand. “This isn’t just for me. It’s a means to fight against supernatural powers in general. People like Birdway and Misaka can’t be defeated with bullets, but they’re still human. If bullets are flying their way, *they have to use their supernatural powers to counter them*. While they are being stopped by that and unable to use their powers for their full potential on something else, Saronia and the Gremlin magicians can circle around and get in a fatal attack.”

“Thanks for the explanation, but that doesn’t answer my damn question! Our only weapons are your right hand and my two hands. How are we supposed to get out of this!?”

“They have to be thinking that we will be afraid of the rain of bullets and avoid trying to break through the center. Of course, the magicians will be blocking any other path of escape.”

“And?”

“If we do what they don’t expect and *do* go straight through the center, we’ll cut Trident and Gremlin off from each other.”

“Are you fucking insane? We don’t have the firepower to pull that off!!”

“Just to make sure, you’re a cyborg and you can make as many nitrogen spears as you have arms, right?”

“How the hell does that help us!? You all took every single one of my extra arms back in Academy City, so I only have these two!!”

“If you don’t have enough, we just need to get you more.”

“…Seriously?”

“Technology is not a talent given only to certain chosen people. This is not Academy City, so we won’t be able to make an arm that looks perfectly human. But *if we focus only on having it function as something to produce nitrogen spears from*, the materials outside Academy City might suffice.”

“Keh. So what, you’re thinking the more additional hands we hide around, the higher the odds of getting in a successful surprise attack?”

“Do you have data on a diagram or something? To be honest, engineering isn’t exactly my forte. I’d have to leave it all to you.”

“…I can manage, but what are you going to do?”

“The enemy has more than just conventional firepower.” Kamijou Touma pulled out his cell phone. “We need to come up with a way to deal with Saronia.”

He called Leivinia Birdway.

“Birdway! Have you made any progress on analyzing the spell Saronia uses? The Leshy thing!”

“The automatic analysis done by the papyrus was completely fake. Mark and the others are gathering data while aiding the marines fighting Trident across the Hawaiian Islands, but they have not gotten any real results yet.”

“Even if they were fake, can’t we use the results from the papyrus?”

“?”

“We were led to that fake information by Saronia, so that means it’s exactly what she wanted us to think was the case. …If I were her, *I would have given the enemy fake information that would lead them away from my own weaknesses*. Something like saying Imagine Breaker was a projectile weapon. We may not be able to do an in depth analysis of her psychology or anything, but can’t we at least try to see what she was trying to hide with the fake information?”

With the additional arms and using the fake information from the papyrus against Saronia, that boy’s cleverness had gone beyond the norm. It may have been due to his many similar past experiences.

“I see. That is a promising proposition. I’ll pass the information on to my subordinates.”

Kamijou hung up and then heard Kuroyoru shouting at him, urged on by the gunfire.

“Hey, hero! Quit leaving everything to others and help me take apart this generator’s transformer and this hot-water heater!!”

“…You’re getting your cyborg parts from there?” Kamijou said half in shock but quickly got to work.

They simply had not time for him to argue.

Part 8

(November 10th – Kauai – Northern Off Limits Area of Napali Coast – From UAV Lesser Emperor #210)

In order to protect Lindy, the monster truck roared off, leaving the large unconscious man behind.

“Hey, Mr. President. You said we need to take her somewhere safe, but where can we escape Olay’s FCE!?”

“I don’t know, but with this monster truck’s mobility, we should head to the central mountainous area of the island! After we lose them, we can think up a way to get off the island!!”

They had no definite means of escape.

The Hawaiian Islands had emergency underground command centers in case there was a crisis on the mainland, but even those thick shelters could not be said to be absolutely safe.

A fixed facility that was already registered was of no value.

Constantly moving around and keeping their location fluid would lower the danger of attack.

Even doing that was like walking a tightrope, but with Trident and Gremlin approaching from behind, Hamazura and the others had no choice but to keep running.

Meanwhile, Roberto Katze checked the Imperial Package and let out a surprised noise.

“Wow…”

“What is it?”

“Warnings are being sent out like crazy over the marine network. Those two—you said they were Academy City Level 5s, right?—are going around neutralizing any force they come across whether it’s marine or Trident.”

“That would be the #1 and the #3. It’s hard to believe that they’re officially known as students,” said Birdway happily.

Even then, red x-marks were appearing one after another on the map. Dozens of x-marks formed two lines showing the routes they were taking.

Napali Coast was rich with untouched nature and areas too dangerous to enter with normal cars covered much of it, but the relatively gentle areas functioned as tourist sites. The two lines of x-marks were scattered about mostly on those areas where people would have been gathered.

“Those damn monsters. Are they trying to get Hollywood to make a movie about them?”

“Here one comes. Ah! The fantastic girl is passing right over us!!”

“Hah?” said Hamazura as he looked up.

At the same time, he heard a dull clunk come from the roof of the monster truck. It sounded like someone had landed on it after falling from the sky.

The roof was forced open and Mikoto’s head stuck in upside down.

“Are you all okay!?”

“I thought you were going around with Accelerator and Misaka Worst, throwing the other two forces into confusion?”

“I did what needed to be done. …Is that girl Lindy-chan?”

“We were just barely managing to get away, girl.”

“That’s good. …Is that idiot not with you? Ugh, and I still haven’t been able to give him the Cupid Arrow tag ring,” muttered Mikoto.

“Are you looking for a boy you’re interested in?” asked Lindy in English.

“Bwoh!? Cough cough! That was all it took for you to figure out what I was talking about with such pinpoint accuracy!?”

“Umm… With a boy, you just need to throw your bra at him and then embrace him without your bra on while he’s taken aback. After that, he’ll be like a dog that was just given its food.”

“Do you know what you’re saying!? Please tell me you don’t understand what that means!” Mikoto shouted and added under her breath, “And I’m sure someone your age doesn’t even wear a bra.”

“That’s what the president told me when I met him before, so it has to be true.”

“She’s right, girl. If you want to get yourself a guy, you need to change into a skimpy swimsuit and have a beer in one hand. All you have to do then is press your chest up against him and undo your bikini. Your point will be even more obvious if you do it near a beachside motel.”

“Even if you’re the president, I’ll still punch you!! If you try to say that’s the American way, it would be an insult to the American people!!”

“Girl, you don’t need to worry. When I gave money to fund the development of string bikinis, my approval rating went up a bit. The population of the United States is aging and some issues are arising with social security, so some drastic measures are needed to raise the birthrate.”

“This isn’t an issue with America!! There’s just something wrong with guys!!”

“Roseline buried her head in her hands for some reason too. I just don’t see why everyone is worrying so much over such a simple matter.”

Suddenly, with the sound of a low thicket being crushed, a mass of steel headed their way. It was a khaki-colored tank with lots of phonebook-like explosive reaction armor attached. As the large mass advanced, its treads seemed to tear into the rock surface, but it was surprisingly fast. It was catching up to the monster truck at over 80 kph.

In shock, the president shouted, “That’s from a Northern European company that entered the tank industry when their country wanted to be like Germany! I thought they had lost to the competition in the EU and disappeared, but it looks like they fell to this level!!”

“So it’s from Trident?”

“Yes. I doubt they’ll fire the main gun at us, but the light machine guns are enough of a problem!!”

“Birdway! Can’t you do something with your magic!?”

“Well, I could, but at this range, I’d blow away the monster truck as well.”

“Then I’ll just have to do something,” said Mikoto.

She pulled her head back up followed by a loud noise. Hamazura checked in the rearview mirror and saw her land neatly on the saw-like bare rock.

Merely being able to counteract such a great speed was enough to set her apart from normal humans.

She stood directly in the path of the tank that was moving at over 80 kph. It was unclear what she had done, but the tank suddenly stopped *as if it had run into an invisible wall.*

"…How much of a monster is she?" muttered Hamazura in shock after the girl disappeared from view.

But the danger was not over. A new disaster showed itself.

It started with a noise.

At first it sounded like the roar of fireworks being set off and a high-pitched whistle-like noise continued on above them. The same thing happened ten to thirty times.

The president realized what it was first and his face paled.

"Brace yourself!! Here it comes!!"

Hamazura did not even have time to ask what was coming.

With an explosive noise, tens or even hundreds of thousands of blades rained down from the heavens.

They were a type of bearing cluster weapon called Cutters. The killing power of a 180 mm gun was enhanced with blades wrapped within the shell like a spring or coil. Like a box cutter, the blades were purposefully made to cut easily and countless numbers of them spread out in the shock of the explosion and rained down on the enemy.

The danger spread seventy meters out from the area of detonation.

With ten to thirty of them, the sharp metal fragments spread out over a wide area with almost no gaps. They were being fired by mass produced guns, but their trajectories were not necessarily the same. Small differences such as temperature, humidity, wind direction, and the way the gun's combustible gas escaped could change the trajectories. The fact that they were so evenly covering the area showed how skilled those firing them were.

The branches of the trees in the mountainous area were chopped off and the roof and hood of the monster truck were covered in orange sparks.

The truck's tires were torn to shreds and the giant four-wheel drive vehicle slid to the side.

"!! Trident again!?"

"No, I signed the bill that led to the adoption of those 180 mm guns. So unless they've been stolen…"

"So it's the marine volunteers!?"

They did not have time to come up with a countermeasure.

Multiple figures silently approached and simultaneously attacked the driver's side and passenger side of the half-destroyed monster truck. Without even opening the doors, Hamazura and Roberto were pulled out through the shattered windows. Another man who was peering into the backseat spotted Birdway and Lindy. Oddly, the man *seemed to overlook* the fact that Birdway was holding a dagger in her right hand while crossing her arms.

"Thirty-one. I have located Lindy Blueshake and will now bring her in. Prepare for the 'negotiations'," the man said into his radio.

"Wait…" gasped the president after he had fallen onto his back when dragged from the window. "I…do not authorize…the use of that method. As the President…of the United States of America…I order you to…"

"What are you going on about? You've lost," spat out the marine. "Who's going to obey a president that won't do anything to protect his own country? You have a duty to at least protect the ones who voted for you. If you won't even do that, then stop calling yourself the president." The man raised his assault rifle. "The job you're supposed to do has been handed over to us. If you're going to interfere with that, then there's no hope for you. …Fortunately, I never said anything about you when I reported finding Lindy Blueshake. No one will find it odd if you don't come back with us."

The marine unhesitatingly aimed at the president's face and smiled.

"Are you an idiot?"

Part 9

(November 10th – Kauai – From UAV Lesser Emperor #113)

Somewhere on the island, a gunshot rang out.

Part 10

(November 10th – Kauai – Northern Off Limits Area of Napali Coast – From UAV Lesser Emperor #210)

Roberto Katze did not shut his eyes even at the very end.

The smell of smoke wafted up and time stopped. In that strange calm, Lindy violently trembled within the half-destroyed monster truck. The nearby gunshot had been quite a shock to her.

However, something was missing.

The smell of blood was clearly lacking.

This was because the president had not been shot.

The gunshot had been a warning shot fired by another marine and aimed at the ground next to the feet of the marine aiming at the president.

The next thing the man targeting Roberto Katze knew, he was surrounded by other marines with assault rifles.

“You’re the idiot,” spat out one of the marines surrounding the minority.

“Y-you can’t be serious. I’m part of the US military, too!”

“Just disarm yourself. Now!!”

As instructed, the man threw all his weapons to the ground. After binding the man’s hands behind his back with a cable, one of the marines saluted the president.

“Please excuse our rude actions up to this point. We deemed this the quickest method of meeting up with you, sir.”

“Mister, who are you…?”

“I am Corporal Martin Flowers.” The marine said while pointing at his chest with his thumb. He then pointed over his shoulder. “Starting from the right, they are Sergeant Elute Lux, Private Xiaolong Harvard, and…”

“I take it I can consider you trustworthy?”

“I could think of no greater honor.”

“Thanks for your cooperation,” Roberto Katze said frankly. He then switched to his “official” tone of voice. “But prepare yourselves. Right now, siding with me will separate you from the main group. You might even be fired on by fellow American soldiers.”

“To be honest, I wish for a strong America that lives up to its name as the world police, and what Presidential Aide Roseline Krackhart and the marine volunteers are doing may be the shortest path there in a way.” Martin Flowers then looked the president square in the eyes. “But that is not something we should gain by sacrificing a child who has suffered abuse. In fact, I believe a strong America that lives up to its name as the world

police should be protecting people like that. We feel you are the one that personifies that ideal the best and that is why we wish to help you."

Roberto smiled and said, "In so doing, we are distancing ourselves from the easy path through life."

"Perhaps, but we will be the ones to get the last laugh."

The United States had begun to move.

It was supported by those with an iron will that did not allow it to lose its order during a crisis.

Part 11

(November 10th – Kauai – Napali Coast – From UAV Lesser Emperor #300)

Following Kuroyoru's instructions, Kamijou was behind the log house wrapping duct tape around and giving shape to the dismantled and rearranged parts of the generator's transformer and the hot-water heater. As he did so, his cell phone started to ring.

"Birdway?"

"Some progress has been made in the analysis you wanted. That said, we still don't know everything about Saronia's spell."

"I need any kind of hint I can get. She'll be here any second!"

"Very well," said Birdway in a satisfied voice. "The false analysis from the papyrus said she had to use Russian plants, but it seems that that was one of the things meant to lead us astray. That means other plants can be used as the origin for her magic as well."

"Is she really that powerful…?" asked Kamijou doubtfully as he looked around.

Plants were everywhere. They were what supported the entire food chain from the bottom. If she could use all of that for her magic that could control people or make someone's left arm unusable, he had no chance of winning unless he fled to a desert or the South Pole.

“Just hear me out,” said Birdway, cutting off Kamijou’s doubts. “To be more accurate, the Leshy spell is magic that gives her control over a small forest in Russia. However, an exception can be made by creating an ‘enclave’.”

“An enclave?”

“If migratory birds regularly come and go through a certain area, that place can be made into an enclave. And the same result could likely be pulled off by putting a pet on an airplane and taking it to the other place. But more importantly, the animal that goes to and from the area must have a magical connection to the local plants.”

“…Can you please explain this a little more clearly? What do you mean by a magical connection?”

“The Leshy controls the residents of the forest. The animals are considered a member of that ‘society’ once they make some kind of exchange with the forest. If she wanted to make some Hawaiian plants into an enclave, she would have to have the animal brought from Russia give something to the local plants.”

“Like eating a plant’s fruit or dropping a seed caught in its fur?”

“My guess is it’s simpler than that. Something so simple that there are almost no animals or plants that don’t take part in it. Plants do not merely support the food chain. They have another important role that gives the earth one of its most important characteristics.”

“…” Kamijou thought for a second. “The exchange of oxygen and carbon dioxide…?”

“Precisely. A report said that Saronia has often been spotted in conifer forests. Those are not used for food. If the animals are gaining something from the plants there, it has to be through the air.”

“So the animals that create the cycle of oxygen and carbon dioxide within the Leshy’s forest become residents of the forest. And when the residents of the forest go elsewhere and create a cycle of oxygen and carbon dioxide with the local plants, that becomes the Leshy’s enclave.” Kamijou organized his thoughts. “But if she could control all the living things in the enclave, wouldn’t we have been under her control long ago!?”

“Didn’t I tell you we still don’t know all the details? And remember that we still don’t know for sure if Saronia’s magic really allows her to control people. If she had something that convenient, surely she would have been able to put together a strategy that made her much more of a major player in World War III.”

“…Then what?”

“Doesn’t it seem strange that she could reproduce the effects of the Leshy, a fairy that rules over the residents of the forest? Creatures with simple brain structures like insects or reptiles are one thing, but what about humans? Perhaps she cannot actually control such a complex living creature and can only switch out how they see certain things or make them more weak-willed.”

“Are you just guessing?”

“I am using the people we captured on Oahu and the hostage children in the shopping mall as samples. They seemed like Voodoo zombies to me. Saronia and Olay’s goal was to gain the majority within the US Congress and other government and military areas. After getting a certain number using Olay’s control of information for an upcoming election, Saronia would only have to manipulate the remaining ones who would not give in so that they were absent on the day of a vote.”

“But then wouldn’t everyone in the area of effect become weak-willed as well? If so, areas across Hawaii should have been like zombie theme parks or something.”

“Like I said, we don’t know the exact conditions. My guess would be that it takes time to establish the cycle of oxygen and carbon dioxide. It might take as long as three or four days. A week would match perfectly with the creation of the world, but I doubt it’s that long. If it took that long, the magician wouldn’t actually go there. Anyway, that would be why we haven’t seen any effects after being here for less than a day.”

“So if the target leaves that enclave before the three or four days, the spell can’t be completed… And an enclave might be as small as a neighborhood park.”

“If she knew the schedule of her target, she could probably create small enclaves at each place he or she would go in order to build up the necessary time.”

That might be linked to the means of controlling animals and people.

But then Kamijou looked down at his unmoving left arm.

“If those are the conditions, I doubt Saronia would come to the front lines. She can’t carry that out without three or four days, so *she must have a spell prepared that gives her some kind of immediate power*.”

“I agree, but I have no idea what that could be.”

“I see.” Kamijou lightly rubbed his left arm. “Looks like I’ll just have to charge in and figure it out as I go.”

“Finished!!” shouted Kuroyoru as she attached the “arm” wrapped in duct tape to the joint on her right side.

It was basically a number of metal pipes forcibly held together in the shape of an arm. It did not even have a full complement of fingers.

Dumbfounded, Kamijou stared at the creakily moving arm for a bit, but he finally came back to his senses.

“You only made one? Counting your normal hands, that only gives you three nitrogen spears!”

Even then, the combined force of Trident and Gremlin was slowly approaching.

Likely, they were being extra careful with their approach and continually firing to seal Kamijou and Kuroyoru’s movements because those two were from Academy City. Trident and Gremlin were afraid they had a hidden trump card. They were cornering Kamijou and Kuroyoru with bullets so they would reveal what they could do. The soldiers would press farther in once they were sure of their safety.

Kamijou himself was planning to charge in and gather information on Saronia’s spell and only then try to find a way past it.

For those that relied on supernatural powers, the amount of information one had could be the difference between life and death.

They were likely more worried about Kuroyoru than Kamijou, but Kamijou had no idea how long their caution would last. If the soldiers saw their lack of movements as an “eerie silence” that would work in their favor, but if the soldiers decided they could not do anything, the soldiers and magicians would pour in like an avalanche.

And amid that hopeless situation…

“I was never intending to rely on Bomber Lance.”

“Why not?”

“An Academy City-made arm can move on its own and I could use it as an independent weapon, but we just won’t get that kind of functionality out of materials we found lying around. When I realized that, I changed my plan.” Kuroyoru grinned. “When you were given that lecture on magic back in Academy City, I was there too. I seem to remember hearing that magic is meant for people with no talent and that, other than a few exceptions, no special disposition is needed.”

“No, you idiot. I’m no expert, but magic isn’t what you’re thinking it is! Unless you’re some kind of genius, you aren’t going to be able to pull of some amazing technique by adlibbing all of a sudden. Not to mention that espers like us experience a side effect if we use magic!!”

“That’s fine,” said Kuroyoru. “It doesn’t matter what kind of magic it is. It doesn’t have to have any real destructive power to it and I doubt I can perfectly pull it off from the little I overheard. That would be like watching someone perform heart surgery and then trying to do the same thing on your own. I’ll fail, but that’s not a problem. *If failing leads to success, that’s not a problem at all.*”

“What are you saying…?”

“I’m saying that I will be intentionally causing this side effect or rejection or whatever it is.” With a heavy thunk, Kuroyoru Umidori lowered the duct tape-wrapped arm to the ground. “I’m a cyborg. The extent of what counts as my body is extremely vague. Now, what if I could completely think of the objects I connect to my body as parts of my body?”

Kamijou heard a sound like a hard object creaking under stress.

At first he thought it was coming from Kuroyoru’s “arm”, but it was not.

“Wouldn’t that mean I could force that side effect on whatever object—whatever target—I wanted and destroy it?”

It came from the ground.

More specifically, it came from one of the saw tooth-like cliffs.

To make up for the “magic-like thing” that Kuroyoru Umidori, an esper, had activated, the rejection had appeared in the improvised arm and then spread to the ground beneath it.

As a result, the entire cliff collapsed.

The log house just barely remained behind the line, but everything beyond the line came crashing down. The silver uniformed mercenaries and magicians on that cliff were swallowed up and swept down into the sea down below.

The avalanche was so clear and distinct that it almost looked like some type of thrill ride.

However, that attraction had no safety standards.

“Gah…!?”

“Kuroyoru!!”

Hearing a short scream, Kamijou looked back up from the bottom of the cliff and saw Kuroyoru’s small body trembling.

The improvised arm wrapped in duct tape had completely shattered and the skin of her other two slender arms had torn from the inside, revealing the artificial “contents”.

“Tch…It was too much to completely avoid any feedback.”

“Are you insane!? It doesn’t look to me like you can just freely cut off the pain!!”

“…I see. So this is insane, is it? Unfortunately, I had the #1’s offensive thought patterns artificially implanted within me, so I have some inconsistencies at the instinctual level. I sense danger when it comes to little bits of pain, but I have almost no fear of fatal wounds. I simply can’t get used to standard group psychology, so it seems there are some areas where I tend to stand out.”

A medical amateur like Kamijou had no way of knowing if the damage had only affected her mechanical parts. However, he felt it would be too much to ask Kuroyoru to fight any more with how much she was trembling.

And Kuroyoru did not give Kamijou time to think.

“This is no time to be looking away. The enemy leader is here.”

“!?”

On the lower portion of the top of the cliff, Saronia A. Irivika alone remained. She must have immediately jumped off of the collapsing ground. When she realized all of the PMC soldiers had fallen into the ocean, she gave an order over her radio.

“…to West Napali Coast. I repeat, send reinforcements to Napali Coast! …Dammit, their command cloud has been completely taken out.”

Saronia clicked her tongue, tossed aside the radio, looked at Kamijou, and smiled.

For a moment, all was silent.

They faced off, one on one, as if in the eye of a hurricane.

If Kamijou could defeat Saronia there, he would effectively be destroying Gremlin and Olay Blueshake’s plan.

“Okay, then!! I’ll give you the privilege of playing with me while I wait for my pizza to arrive!!”

“Sorry, but the only thing you’re going to be tasting is defeat!!”

Part 12

(November 10th – Kauai – Waimea Valley – From a camera for recording proceedings)

Waimea Valley was a giant valley in the mountainous area of Kauai. The sight of cliff after cliff each dozens of meters high made it a valuable tourist attraction, but it was an inconvenient place to get around in. It was one of the routes that led to Napali Coast where Lindy Blueshake was thought to be, but few roads were made in such a dangerous area and that made advancing difficult when a defensive line had been built up.

Presidential Aide Roseline Krackhart was stuck.

The narrow paths through the mountains were blocked by multiple armored vehicles Trident had brought in. Luckily, the enemy force had been eliminated with anti-tank missiles and the mercenaries had retreated, but the wreckage of the armored vehicles remained. They could not advance until that wreckage was removed.

Roseline clicked her tongue and then noticed the video camera recording her.

“Are you still recording this?”

“I-if I don’t focus on my job, I feel like I’ll pass out…”

“That camera is cut off from the internet, right?”

“Yes, I switched it over manually. All those kinds of services have been shut off.”

“Are you sure?”

“Look, the display says off.”

“Hm, fine then.”

Just as Roseline took her focus away from the camera, a different worker called out to her.

“Ma’am! Um…”

“What is it?”

“You have a phone call.”

Roseline took the proffered cell phone and grimaced upon seeing the string of letters displayed on the screen. She answered it and heard a familiar male voice.

“Hey, Roseline! I thought it was about time I spoke with you.”

“*I* am the one that needs to speak with *you*!!” Roseline gritted her teeth, thinking that man must have a talent for angering others. “Why have you convinced some of my marines to split off and form their own group!? We were at enough of a disadvantage against Trident. We do not need our chances lowered even further by splitting our own troops!!”

“I thought you’d say that. And that’s why I’ve come to make a deal with you.”

“A deal!?”

“I’m not keeping up this resistance because I want the marines to be fighting each other. It was actually a complete coincidence that I managed to get their help, but since I have them, I want to use them to their fullest.”

“This doesn’t seem like one of your bluffs. How do you intend to defeat Trident?”

“*I don’t intend to.*”

He said that so readily that Roseline’s mind went completely blank.

Finally, she came back to her senses.

“Wha—What!? You…but…!!!?”

“Y’know, I think you have the makings of a Japanese tsundere, Roseline. You’re usually so perfect in everything, but you have no ability to adlib to deal with sudden things you didn’t expect.”

“Enough with the jokes!! And I think that qualifies as sexual harassment!”

“I guess I need to explain myself. Even if I had not split the marines in two, they would have gotten stuck in a long, drawn-out battle against Trident’s units attempting to retrieve Lindy. I am the president, so I have to do my best to avoid a situation where this nation’s citizens’ lives are needlessly wasted. What do you think?”

“…So you purposefully split my force just to interfere?”

“They are the US’s forces, not yours,” corrected Roberto Katze. “There are currently two problems on Kauai. The first is the Trident group trying to recover Lindy and the second is you, Roseline. I would like to solve those problems one at a time. This only looks so complicated because I was trying to solve both of them at once.”

“Are you trying to say you could resolve this if you had command of the marine volunteers?”

“Even I think before I take action.”

“I’m sorry, Mr. President, but I cannot trust what you are saying. I’m going to hang up.”

“You trust me that little!? But the people showed how much trust they have in me during the election!”

“The Washington Stream said you had more pipedreams than any other politician but that your crazy ideas might help jumpstart the stagnated economy.”

“Just listen. There is a way to defeat Trident.”

“Other than Lindy Blueshake?”

“Other than Lindy Blueshake.”

Hearing that, Roseline sighed.

She ground her teeth as she could feel her conscience crumbling inside her after she had worked so hard to solidify it.

She lightly kicked the tire of her off-road car and said, “So what are you going to do? We will take it into consideration, so just tell me.”

“Thanks, tsundere-chan. First, their source of money is Olay Blueshake. We intend to deal with her master plan by capturing Saronia A. Irivika. Just by defeating her, it will all fall apart. But that still leaves one problem. Do you know what that is, Roseline?”

“…Even if Olay gives up, Trident will not necessarily stop. They are fighting under the assumption that all of their crimes in America will be cleared from them by Olay’s political influence. If they withdraw, they will not just be traitors, but unheard-of criminals who started a war with America. More death penalties would be handed out at once than ever before in American history.”

“And they know that the world police will chase after them even if they flee the country. After all, former American soldiers make up a good portion of Trident. That is why Trident will not stop and we need to do something about that. If we can just solve that issue, it will all be over. I doubt those from Gremlin mixed in with the PMC troops will continue fighting on their own. If they could have, they would have done so from the beginning. That is why we need a method of dealing with Trident.”

“And how do we pull it off?”

“At the very least, it has to be a method that does not use Lindy Blueshake as a shield. That only worked as a trump card against Olay, so it will be of no help against the PMC she hired.”

“Again, how do we do it?”

“As you said, the primary driving force behind them is the fact that they will be executed if they retreat. I don’t know whether the former American soldiers wanted to get something across to the country or if the reward was just too tempting, but that is the only way we can get them to back off.”

“…If you have no intention of telling me, I’m just going to hang up.”

“We start with Trident’s commander. Or in this case, would it be their manager?” the president said. “Anyway, he must be here on Kauai. I’m guessing either he—just like Saronia—wanted to use Lindy as a means of preventing Olay from betraying him or he wanted to show that he saved her ‘personally’ to get in Olay’s favor. Either way, he would gain a lot. …Also, their command cloud uses even radar and civilian satellites to allow high speed intelligence support. The main server is likely overseas, but the information network the data is being sent through uses the internet within America. That allows Olay to spy on them using her FCE surveillance network and it allows me to interfere with my Imperial Package.”

“You know where the commander is?!”

“I have a question for you, Roseline. It would be difficult to defeat the Trident troops deployed across Kauai and the other Hawaiian Islands using only the marines we have. But what if we only had to deal with the platoon protecting the commander?”

Part 13

(November 10th – Kauai – Napali Coast – From UAV Lesser Emperor #300)

Kamijou Touma charged across the rough ground and straight for Saronia A. Irivika. His greatest weapon was his right fist. Preparing circumstances in which it was effective was the starting point of any of his strategies.

But…

“(…What? I’m so unsteady…!)”

“Yes, yes. You can’t control your own weight, can you?” Saronia grinned. “Your arms are balancers used to control your weight and your left arm is currently unusable. Someone who has been without an arm for years may be fine, but with it suddenly switched off like that, you can’t control yourself properly.”

“!!”

“And your weight is the true force behind your fist.”

A dull noise exploded out.

Saronia had jabbed her leg out toward Kamijou’s chest. He had just barely managed to block it with his right arm, but it still sent him backwards. After reeling two or three steps back, he finally managed to regain control.

She was indeed well trained, but Saronia was still a small girl.

It was likely only due to Kamijou’s lack of control over his own weight that she had been able to send him so far back.

“Gh…” groaned Kamijou

While humming, Saronia continued with her kicks. The next one circled around toward Kamijou’s left side.

He could not move his left arm.

Her sharp strike stabbed straight into that gap in his defenses.

“Gaaaaaaahhhhh!?”

“Gremlin is desperate for any countermeasures we can get against Imagine Breaker. Why do you think we tampered with the leylines to send that fortress to see if you were alive, nyaaahn!?” Saronia thinly smiled as she estimated the damage she must be doing from what she felt with her foot. “Thanks to that, even an indoor type like me has been going to the gym and working up a sweat! I’ve gotten some lovely muscles for my legs☆”

“Tch!”

“Yes, and now you will try to put some distance between us.”

Kamijou forced his right arm around to hold his left side and tried to fall back, but Saronia’s slender arm grabbed at his collar.

She pulled him forward while swinging her head down as a blunt weapon.

With a dull noise, Kamijou’s body bent backwards.

“(This isn’t how someone who merely controls people would fight!!)”

Saronia continued to throw kicks, focusing on the left half of his body while words leaked from the bottom of Kamijou's throat.

"(But she isn't using her magic either. Is this another sign of their unease over Imagine Breaker just like Radiosonde Castle!?)"

"More or less." By aiming for the left side of his body, Saronia was making sure he could not grab at her feet. "But everything has its use. Even if I cannot directly bind Imagine Breaker, I can lower its strength by sealing off your left arm."

Unable to support his own weight, Kamijou rolled across the ground while undergoing a rush of kicks from Saronia. Saronia then moved her right thumb as if flicking something straight up.

"(...Here it comes!!)"

Still on the ground, Kamijou held out his right arm, but much to his surprise, nothing happened.

Silence hung over the area for a few seconds.

Still not sure what that meant, Kamijou rolled to the side to put some distance between them. The sole of Saronia's shoe seemed to chase after him.

She had no real reason to pull a feint in that situation, so...

"A misfire!?"

"Looks that way, nyahn."

She caught up to Kamijou with a motion like she was trying to kick a soccer ball as hard as she could.

With the breath knocked out of him and while suppressing the urge to vomit, Kamijou muttered, "...What are...you doing...?"

"Ahn?"

"That war is finally over and everyone was beginning to walk down a new path..."

"Oh, you're asking why I am interfering?" Saronia's expression loosened, but a piercing light remained in her eyes. He had touched on something he should not have. "Yes, the war ended. You played an important role in ensuring that. The chaos ended and the countries of the world took action to rebuild." Saronia paused for a second. "But my country was used as a stepping stone to do so."

"..."

“It isn’t funny. It truly isn’t funny. Children starve needlessly and the elderly shiver in the cold needlessly. The major countries have control of the flow of resources and money. They dole out only what they absolutely have to and call themselves heroes for doing so. It feels like justice is up for sale in a whorehouse.”

Kamijou had no idea what the truth of the matter was or if Saronia was even telling the truth from her point of view.

But whether she was being truthful or not, he should have guessed it.

Even then, something was advancing.

He could see glimpses of the shadows of the greedy ones.

He was no prophet, so it was impossible for him to know the ripple-like effects his actions would bring about. But this time at least, his actions had clearly been involved in how things had turned out.

“Saronia…”

“I suppose the one piece of luck for you is that you do not have piles of money at your disposal.”

The green magician smiled.

It was the smile of a fairy.

It was the smile of the ruler of the forest.

It was the strange smile of the one who brought death to those who lost their way and who would distribute her riches in gambles she held at a whim.

“But even so, I still have enough reason to kill you.”

“…”

No matter what he would do from then on and no matter how he would face the ripple-like effects brought about by that war, he had to survive his current situation first.

He had to find the truth behind Saronia’s attacks and the spell she used.

What were the rules behind it and what process did the attacks use?

What could he negate and what could he not?

He needed concrete information.

“(What do I have to destroy to regain use of my left arm? I need to find out!!)”

“Let us begin again,” said Saronia as she loosely clenched her hands and charged forward. “Let us begin the gamble of the Leshy, the ruler of the forest!!”

She moved both her thumbs as if flicking something straight up.

Part 14

(November 10th – Kauai – Nohili Port – From a tide level monitoring camera)

In a civilian port on the western side of Kauai, Cinesic Evers, commander of the Trident PMC, raised his hands into the air. He was wearing an old-fashioned but popular French military uniform for high officials. Even after leaving the military and joining a company, old men seemed not to lose their desire for power.

The reason he was raising his hands was quite simple. American marines were spread out around the dock, their rifles were aimed at him, and his command armored vehicle covered in antennae had been blown up.

Amid all that, Roberto Katze pushed passed the marines protecting him and approached with a clear smile on his face.

“Hey there. If I had to take a guess, I’d say you are a former French naval officer who lost his standing after having the failures of British Halloween shoved on you. You couldn’t have worked your way up the ranks this quickly using normal means, so did you manage to take control during the confusion of the war?”

“…Why do you want to know?”

“I was just asking. So what, are you being backed by the EU? They’re having economic troubles of their own and they were left ruined by that war without being able to profit.”

“Ridiculous. There is nothing that proves the EU is in any way connected with us.”

“As I said, I’m only asking. But I get the feeling I know the truth by the fact that you spoke to defend the EU rather than Trident. And when I think about it, I can see political intent in the fact that Trident’s primary area of activity was in Eastern Europe that is not a part of the EU. There must have been a connection even before you took over. …Well, that doesn’t really matter,” the president said before changing the subject. “To be honest, we have a difficult problem here.”

“Are there really any easy problems?”

“True enough, but this one is different. The crime of declaring war on the United States is so unprecedented that I’m not even sure there is any legislation dealing with it. That means that if we arrest you, the odds of you getting thrown in prison are a complete unknown.”

“…”

“And that’s a problem.” Roberto Katze shrugged. “If we can’t judge you under existing laws, we might have no choice but to deal with you simply as foreign invaders. And remember, *if you cannot be judged by the law, you cannot be protected by the law either*. We cover it up with the word war, but in reality it is no different from slaughtering people without a trial.”

“…It’s too late. Once Olay Blueshake and Saronia A. Irivika take control of the government at its core, everything will be turned around.”

“Sorry, but that isn’t going to happen.” Roberto shrugged. “Mister, I’m sure you’ve realized that Saronia is not a normal soldier and that she does not use normal firepower. She uses *those techniques* that a certain sadistic British princess (who would make a good tsundere) showed us during British Halloween and that we saw all too much of during World War III. I may not look it, but I am a high school dropout, so I leave difficult things like magic to the specialists.”

“The specialists…? You don’t mean…!!”

“Mister, they may be the greatest target of your hatred, but it is still best to leave it to the specialists. I have taken the proper measures and so Saronia will soon be defeated. Once that happens, both you and Olay have no means of victory. …You don’t seem to understand, so let me be very clear.” Roberto spoke slowly as he stared straight into Cinesic’s eyes to emphasize his absolute advantage. “This is not a negotiation to see who wins and who yields. Your and Trident’s defeat is a sure thing. What is on the table is how much your crimes can be reduced. So get serious about this. As things stand now, you and the rest of Trident will pay your debt by being slaughtered as a wartime enemy. Currently, Kilauea’s eruption has sealed off our various advantages, but if this issue is prolonged and our forces clash once more, do you really think Trident’s 50,000 troops can defeat 5,000,000 troops from the four branches of our military as well as troops from our various allies? It would pain me to simply slaughter you all without a trial…*but there just isn’t any legislation for this kind of situation*. You need to seriously think about how you can survive this.”

“So you’re telling us to break our contract with Olay and quickly withdraw all our troops?”

“If that is your choice, then you should do so. I will let you assess the situation here and make your decision, but just remember that time is of the essence.”

"…"

Roberto Katze took a military radio from a nearby marine and pressed it against Cinesic's chest.

Holding the radio, Cinesic thought for a bit and then sighed.

He set the frequency and brought the radio up to his mouth.

With a tone like he had given up on something he said, "To all troops deployed among the Hawaiian Islands. All other areas do not matter. It does not matter how much ground the Americans recover. All forces are to assist Saronia A. Irivika in Napali Coast of Kauai."

Roseline Krackhart's face paled when she heard his words.

Roberto Katze's face stiffened and he asked, "Are you serious, you bastard?"

"I am quite serious."

"That decision does not merely affect your own future. It affects the futures of all 50,000 of your subordinates including the ones who are not in America."

"If you want to shoot me, do it," Cinesic muttered as he tossed aside the radio. "As long as Saronia is safe, we can turn this situation around. My target is right here and Lindy Blueshake, the tool I can use to deal with our client, has shown herself. Saronia with her occult powers and your anti-occult personnel will face off. The victor there will show us who truly needs to withdraw."

Part 15

(November 10th – Kauai – Napali Coast – From UAV Lesser Emperor #300)

Saronia A. Irivika's magic took its name from the Leshy, a Russian fairy that was said to rule the forest.

The identity of the attack was unknown, but something had paralyzed half of Kamijou's body centered on his left arm.

Saronia loosely clenched her fists and moved her thumbs up as if flicking something straight up and Kamijou rolled to the side to gain some distance.

But…

“Nothing…again? Another misfire!?”

“Chehh. They just won’t hit!!”

Seeming not to care that nothing had occurred, Saronia tried to continue attacking Kamijou with her kicks. However, she was just a little too slow. Kamijou managed to effectively gain some distance and stand up.

He used his right arm to stop the foot that flew toward him like a hammer and gave voice to his speculation.

“Is it something like a mine or a trap? Is it an attack that waits for me to step into it rather than firing a bullet!?”

“I guess it was only a matter of time before you figured it out. But a mine can be used as a grenade if you get close enough to throw it.”

Kamijou could see that Saronia was holding some things in her hand.

Each one was only about a millimeter across.

The identity of the sand-like objects she held was…

“Plant seeds!?”

Kamijou immediately twisted his body to the side and managed to avoid the rain of seeds that were thrown at him like a scattershot.

However…

“Too bad,” said Saronia with a sneer. “Pollen is good enough to bring about the effects.”

Kamijou’s body fell straight down.

Unable to support his own weight, he collapsed to the ground.

It was a simple matter of prestidigitation. Saronia had openly held the seeds to draw his attention while using her other hand to undo the cord holding a small bag shut.

“Gh…gh…”

“Looks like I got your entire left side this time. I gotta say, you did put up a fight. Normally, you would have undergone multiple organ failure by just breathing it in.”

The first attack when Kamijou and Kuroyoru had hidden behind the log house must have been due to pollen on the wind.

“It’s a bit like a chemical weapon, so it can be pretty nasty, but it can get a little difficult to use once the trick is revealed. Then the enemy just has to maintain a position upwind of you or even produce wind themselves. That’s why there are really only two ways to use it. You can either get a first attack in before the enemy has had time to analyze it or find the perfect time like I just did. …It’s pretty rare for someone to get hit by both types like this.”

Plant seeds.

Or pollen.

The Leshy fairy that Saronia’s magic was based on was supposedly the ruler of the forest. The Leshy controlled all living things in that zone and gave or took away things in gambles. That was what Birdway had told Kamijou.

Which meant…

“So this is a penalty against someone who injures the property…of the zone…?”

“I have no intention of giving you the answers,” said Saronia as she brought the seeds into her palm once more.

However, she may as well have given him the answer. It was most likely a punishment for those who obstructed the development of the plants. That was the base of Saronia’s spell. That obstruction could be stepping on a seed or getting in the way of the pollen as it flowed through the air.

But…

“(I still don’t know where the attack comes from once I step on the seed. What rules are behind it? Where does the damage come from?)”

A few images flew by in the back of Kamijou’s mind.

He spoke while unable to get up.

“The ruler of the forest, hm?”

“Yes, but I’m not a forest girl.”

“If you could have the animals attack me, you would have already done so.”

"…Well, I'm not all powerful."

Saronia seemed to try to respond without faltering, but Kamijou noticed a slight hesitation.

Kamijou's suspicions were confirmed.

For someone who claimed to be the ruler of the forest, only having a connection to the plants was too weak. She could likely interfere with the insects and other animals in the area. As Birdway had mentioned, even if she could not directly control humans, animals with simpler brain structures like insects and reptiles were a different story.

So had Kamijou been attacked by some kind of poisonous insect?

No, he would have felt some pain if that were the case.

His only hint was…

"(In her first attack with the pollen, I was hit but Kuroyoru was not.)"

Was it because she was a cyborg? Did it have no effect on a mechanical arm?

No.

It had only been Kamijou who had taken the pollen to his left arm. Kuroyoru had been standing next to him, so she would likely been hit by the windblown pollen elsewhere. And yet no effects had shown themselves. Other than her arms and part of her upper body, Kuroyoru was no different from a normal human.

The fact that she was a cyborg should not have mattered.

Something other than that had to have made Kuroyoru Umidori a special case.

She had a portion of the #1's thought patterns artificially implanted within her.

She had inconsistencies at the instinctual level. She could not get used to standard group psychology.

As Kamijou lay on the ground, he looked back over at his unmoving left arm.

He had thought there had been a problem with the "hardware" that was his arm, but he had been wrong.

The "hardware" was being sent commands by the "software" that was his mind. That "software" was where the interference was occurring.

However, Kamijou's mind had not directly fallen under Saronia's control. If that had happened, he would have taken much more damage. It was the punishment for treading on the development of a plant. That punishment was being accomplished solely by controlling a group of insects or small animals.

Kamijou thought for a bit.

"!!"

He suddenly grabbed his cell phone with his still moving right arm and quickly pressed a few buttons.

"I thought I told you I have no intention of giving you the answers!"

Saronia let fly a kick.

The kick struck his right wrist and another one stabbed into his side after he had let go of the phone.

"Gh…gah…!!"

"Calling Birdway of the Dawn-Colored Sunlight again? Quit thinking you can just ask her anything and get an answer! Search engines really have emptied the minds of this generation."

Kamijou glanced over toward his phone which had flown a fair bit away and then looked back toward Saronia.

"This is an exclusion from the 'forest' you have created in this zone. By gathering the small, simple creatures like insects and reptiles, you can control the minds of a majority of the creatures in this area. That way, you always win in issues of majority rule. The 'forest residents' are forcibly linked by something like group psychology and this allows you to focus their malice and hostility on one point. That results in what is happening here. *You can externally interfere with and distort the mind that is normally inside a person*."

The penalty was the exclusion of an irregular element to maintain the stability of the society.

It was the suppression of a minority by the majority.

Saronia was the one reproducing it as an attack, but she looked surprised.

"I can see why you need to rely on that phone of yours. Group psychology only exists among humans. You were heading in the right direction with the idea of being rejected by the forest residents, though." Saronia sneered. "With my spell, I first evenly maintain the minds of all living things within the specified zone. There is no distinction between

human and beetle, but there is a division between those within the zone or outside of it. Only then can something like group psychology be used."

The identity of her spell was made clear.

Kamijou had the information he needed to find a way past it.

But…

"So have you figured out its weakness?" Still sneering, Saronia approached him. "Even if you have, can you pull it off with the left half of your body completely paralyzed? As I said before, control of your weight is directly linked to the force behind your fist. Now that you can't brace your legs, you would need muscles on the level of a grizzly to knock someone unconscious."

"…Not necessarily."

"?"

Saronia did not even have time to raise her voice in confusion.

Kamijou Touma's body suddenly stood up from its collapsed state on the ground. It was an impossible action for a human. As if his heel was acting as a hinge, he stood up like a basement door on the floor opening.

"Wha—!?"

Saronia was utterly shocked, but then she realized what had happened.

Two slender feminine arms were wrapped around Kamijou's waist. The palms had produced something like lances made of air which had launched Kamijou's body up and forward.

As Saronia watched, the two arms smoothly wrapped around Kamijou's left leg and reinforced it like a cast.

No, it was more like a powered suit that mechanically augmented his strength.

"Mechanical…arms? So you were using the phone to—!?"

"I never said I was calling Birdway. In fact, I never said I was making a call!!"

It may have been improvised, but he now had control of his left leg.

Saronia had carelessly drawn close enough for him to plow his right fist straight into her at full strength.

That was the strike that she—that Gremlin—was so worried about.

Imagine Breaker slammed into her and a dull noise burst out.

Saronia A. Irivika's small body bent backwards.

But that was it.

She held her ground. Her lip split and a trail of blood dripped down, but she did not go down.

"I already told you!" she spat out while grabbing a large number of seeds in her right hand. "Even if you can use your leg, your left arm is paralyzed, so you can't control your goddamn weight!!"

She threw the seeds at Kamijou as if scattering salt.

Taking the shower of seeds straight on, Kamijou collapsed to the ground once more. His entire body convulsed. He had no idea what expression was on his face and he could feel his blood vessels pulsating unnaturally. He could not move anything except for the part of his right arm that was past the elbow.

"…Chehh. So your organs are still functioning. I guess it really is best to get the pollen directly in the target's mouth."

"…Gh…Khah…"

Kamijou could not even breathe without focusing on it.

He moved his right arm and slowly crawled, scraping himself across the hard ground.

"You are the one who ended the war. There was one thing I wanted to ask you if I ever met you."

Kamijou now knew the details of Saronia A. Irivika's Leshy spell.

But he still had a question.

She could only use her magic after creating numerous "enclaves" linked back to her small forest in Russia. Birdway had suspected the preparation time for one of those enclaves was a few days long.

However, Saronia had only learned that Lindy Blueshake was there a half hour or so before.

Saronia would not have had time to prepare an enclave.

“Why did you end the war the way you did? The areas like Russia that were brought to ruin by the war are undergoing reconstruction, but do you know what is actually going on there?”

“Academy City and America are…”

“They are messing with other people’s countries as they see fit just for fun.” Saronia smiled, but it was completely devoid of joy. “In exchange for all the money they are throwing around, they are interfering with the structure of the government, seizing control of infrastructure like electricity and water, and deciding who will be saved and who will not. And yet they are part of the group that pulled the trigger that started that war. They are dividing people up like oranges being packed into boxes and then throwing away the boxes they don’t like the taste of.”

“…”

“Even my small forest was cleared away and covered in asphalt. If I had not joined Gremlin, I would have been unable to transfer over the power that makes me a magician.”

Had she started by making all of Hawaii or at least Kauai into an enclave? That was not it. If she had done that, she would have put Lindy into a trance before trying to forcibly abduct her. Even if she was up against amateurs, it would have been better to eliminate all possibility of escape or resistance.

“I know that world has ended and cannot be brought back, but we can live on even after it has ended. I want to make the preparations for that. And this life will not be something forced on us by Academy City or America.”

That meant there had to be a reason.

There had to be some kind of trick that allowed her to create an enclave there without waiting for days.

“It seems Gremlin as a whole and Olay are trying to destroy the balance between science and magic by recreating the United States into a theocracy, but that is nothing more than a trivial task to me. I don’t care what it is as long as it rids Russian and Europe of those who *use the name of justice to profit*.”

“We…” Kamijou forced out his words even as it felt like his breathing would stop. “We did not…end that war…for that to happen. We…”

“But that was the result.”

“Then…it is my duty…to fight those who…are making you suffer in the…name of justice. There is no…need for you to…do these things… that will make the world…blame you.”

“How naïve. You were only able to end that war because of all the preparations made by others. What can a mere pawn do when faced with the people who made those preparations?”

Saronia needed two things for her Leshy spell.

Plants and animals.

When Saronia possessed plants and animals that created a cycle of oxygen and carbon dioxide, she transformed that area into a “forest”. In that twisted zone, she ruled over the twisted community and had assaulted Kamijou with a twisted penalty based on twisted rules.

“And you are weak. Gremlin has joined together to fight the world’s victors. How is a loser who cannot even defeat a single one of us supposed to accomplish something as grand as you are proposing?”

In that case, couldn’t she use a type of supplement?

Instead of using the cycle of oxygen and carbon dioxide to make an enclave out of the local plants over the course of a few days, she could *bring in one of the original plants and plant it directly into the soil*. That would get rid of the few days of lag. If she also opened cages holding insects and small animals already under the control of that plant, Saronia would indeed have control of the majority of the forest residents.

And as an extra hint, Kamijou Touma had seen someone bring a plant into that area.

“And so I think it is about time I sent the finishing blow to your heart.”

“Saronia…!!”

“If you’re going to make some idealized argument, I wish you would give some strength along with it. After all, that’s what led to us getting trampled on during that war.”

Harzak Lolas.

That large man who was Lindy Blueshake’s guardian. Just before the attack, he had been planting a seedling. Kamijou doubted Harzak was working for Saronia, but all the flower shops or vending machines he might have stopped by to buy the seedling could have been attacked and had the seedlings switched out. That way he would have unwittingly carried out his role.

It was also true that Trident had waited until after he had finished planting the seedling to attack.

In that case, it had to be the origin of Saronia’s magic.

The seedling had been planted *in the small garden to the side of the log house!!*

"…Ah?" said Saronia A. Irivika questioningly.

She was surprised because Kamijou was still breathing even after she had scattered countless seeds atop him.

And then she realized something.

At some point as Kamijou used only his right hand to drag himself along the ground, he had made it to the garden. And he had used that single usable part of his body to pull out the seedling that had been planted in the soft soil.

That seedling was the origin of the spell that took its name from a fairy that ruled the forest.

Normally, countless such origins would exist within the zone, but that one plant was the core due to that zone's rushed construction.

And he had pulled it out using that right hand that had an absolute effect on magic.

"Im…possible…"

"…"

Kamijou Touma slowly stood up.

His body was no longer bound by anything. All his limbs moved as he wished them to. He once more had everything necessary to put all his weight behind his fist.

Kamijou spun his right shoulder around to check on his arm and Saronia merely stood watching without attacking due to having lost her absolute trump card. She had developed her special foot techniques based on the assumption that Kamijou would be unable to control his weight due to an unusable left arm.

One had regained his trump card.

The other had lost hers.

"…Sorry, Saronia."

"Ohh…"

"I've caught up to where you stand and I can now see what you see. But if what you say is true, then you are not the one that should be risking your life in this fight."

“Ooooooooooohhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhh!?”

After that, primitive sounds of violence continued for a time.

Part 16

(November 10th – Kauai – Nohili Port – From a tide level monitoring camera)

Having received the report, President Roberto Katze pointed to the military radio that Cinesic Evers, the commander of Trident, had tossed aside.

“Pick it up, you bastard,” said the president.

“So Saronia A. Irivika was defeated.”

“Your dream has been shattered. It’s time to look at the cold, hard truth, mister.”

Cinesic could have all his troops fight to take Saronia back, but it would be all over if they held her hostage. If it seemed likely Trident would actually succeed in taking her back, they would just kill her. At that point, Saronia and Olay’s plan to conquer the United States would fail.

Now that Trident’s crimes could no longer be cleared away, continuing the fight would be nothing more than tying a noose around his own neck. The isolation of the Hawaiian Islands due to Kilauea’s eruption would not last forever.

“…What are your terms?”

“How about we start with 300 years in clandestine detention facilities in the Arctic and Alaska, with no chance of trial. If you quickly withdraw all your troops, end this chaos, and reveal all information you have on the organization you dealt with named Gremlin, I might consider reducing your penalty. …So basically, get your troops the hell out of here and tell us everything.”

EPILOGUE

Reliable Birdway.

Queen_Period.

Part 1

(November 10th – Oahu – Honolulu International Hotel – From the lounge security camera)

A few hours had passed since the Hawaiian Islands had been rescued from the menace of the PMC known as Trident and the magic cabal known as Gremlin. Kamijou and the others had gathered at the hotel the president constantly used for his press conferences and scandals.

Lindy Blueshake was there with them.

Being mindful of the young girl, Roberto Katze turned toward Kamijou and the others to speak.

“Trident has been confirmed to have disarmed itself and surrendered. For now, the problems in Hawaii have been solved.”

“…You look rather displeased for someone with such good news.”

“Only Trident remained,” said the president with a heavy sigh. “Those people who had the power of the occult were among them before wearing the same silver uniforms. And there were a lot of them. If they gathered together, there would be a few hundred of them, but we can’t find any sign of them among the Trident forces we’ve captured.”

Some of the magicians mixed in with Trident had been defeated at the beginning of the invasion, but those had disappeared at some point too.

They must have used the chaos in Hawaii to escape.

Given their numbers and role, those Gremlin magicians almost simply seemed like “the others” who had been helping Trident. They had likely been less closely guarded than Cendrillon or Saronia, but disappearing completely like that was still quite a feat.

That disappearance almost seemed to outdo the impact of the supposed major players like Cendrillon or Saronia.

Those were the enemy Kamijou and the others were faced with.

Those magicians were not just “others”. Each individual one was very different and they had displayed in Hawaii that they could gather together as an organization.

“Gremlin…”

“We only have Saronia A. Irivika and that Cendrillon girl to rely on due to the extra guards we put on them. However, others from the group may try to crush anything or anyone that could give us a hint.”

When had Gremlin withdrawn and where had they gone?

The magic side had its own rules and formalities, but they acted so efficiently it almost made Kamijou forget that.

With a bitter expression, Kamijou said, “And we still haven’t found the other person behind this.”

“Olay Blueshake,” said Roberto Katze with an annoyed sigh.

Hamazura frowned and said, “But didn’t you say no one knows where she is? A search not just through America but across the world isn’t going to end in just a day or two, right?”

“That lady has a lot of enemies. To be honest, I doubt she’ll show her face for over a decade. However, we can use that disappearance to our advantage.”

“?”

The president’s words left Kamijou and the others puzzled.

Roberto ignored them and pointed toward Lindy with his thumb.

“Finding Olay would be difficult, but with this girl’s cooperation, we can strip Olay of all the power that makes her special.”

♦

(Unknown Time – Unknown Location – Unknown Camera ID – From footage with altered video and audio)

“Trident has failed.”

Hearing those words from her aide, Olay Blueshake sighed.

“What about Gremlin?”

“The hotline has been disconnected. They have likely cut off the cooperative relationship from their end.”

“…So they’ve given up on me,” muttered Olay. “The fools. A failed plan or two does not rid me of my economic power. Just leave them be. Later, they’ll come back, crying to be back on my side.”

“Do you have an alternative plan for conquering the United States?”

“With Saronia’s control gone, my control of Congress has crumbled a bit, but I still have plenty of pawns I can manipulate using my control of information for elections. Even If I can’t control a majority, I can still cause confusion. First I create a political vacuum to buy some time. During that time I contact Gremlin or some other organization and make preparations to rebuild.”

Suddenly, something on the TV she constantly left on caught Olay Blueshake’s eye.

Even overseas, Olay usually had some influence as to what was shown on the news, so she normally paid little attention to the TV. She only kept it on to check on the information she herself had created.

But this was different.

The female newscaster was saying something Olay did not expect.

“Breaking news.”

“?”

“The American Bar Association has just held a press release. In accordance with the inheritance wishes of Olay Blueshake, who is known as America’s media queen, the management of her group has transferred all of her assets and economic foundation to her only daughter, Lindy Blueshake.”

For an instant, Olay’s mind went completely blank.

“What…? I never said that!!”

But immediately afterwards, she opened her notebook computer to check on her internet bank account.

However, she was unable to do so.

When she inputted her ID and password, a simple message was displayed: Either the entered ID or password is incorrect or you do not have authorization to view this page.

“It’s my account!!” Olay shouted as the newscaster’s voice continued on.

“Lindy Blueshake is only eight years old, so her legal guardian, Harzak Lolas, will be temporarily put in charge. However, it has come out that Olay may have been deeply involved in the incident in Hawaii. If these allegations turn out to be true, it is likely most of her assets will disappear to compensate for the damage done.”

It was all disappearing.

Her assets, her economic foundation, her network, her power.

That power had allowed her to hire a PMC, make contact with a magic cabal, and control America’s information networks.

And if she lost that power, all of those on her side would disappear too.

Her opportunity was disappearing.

“Shit!! Call the lawyers from Holdings! I won’t let my power be stolen by a joke like this!!”

“I can’t…”

“Do it anyway! The longer we wait…!!”

“This is not a normal method!! This isn’t just slightly flawed; it’s full of holes!! And yet it’s going through as legal! The president and those around him have likely made some kind of move. This is not something that can be resolved in a normal trial!!”

“Liquidation of the subsidiaries, public companies, real estate, and the like has already begun, but this seems to be a means of minimizing the damage to the shareholders. The group’s market value is headed down and trust after transferring to new ownership is…” continued the news.

“I can’t deal with this here…” Olay said.

Her throne.

Her empire.

While all that she had built up was crumbling around her, Olay gritted her teeth and reached for the coat on the wall.

“Wh-where are you going!?”

“I am going out. A representative is putting words in my mouth. If I show myself to the government…!!”

“Once your location is known, you will be assassinated!!”

“!!”

“You have made too many enemies and there is no guarantee that you will regain the assets you need to protect yourself. And even if you are not assassinated, that news report made it clear that you are already being pursued as a major suspect. If you make a public appearance, you will be arrested!!”

“It may be risky, but as long as I can regain my money…my power…!!”

“Some of it will return to Miss Lindy, but if the company is reorganized and all the funds are sent there, any money that would go from Miss Lindy to you could disappear! And since they are trying to strip you of your power, they will surely ensure that is what happens!!”

“Then…then…what am I supposed to do…?”

Her aide did not immediately reply.

Now that their connection via money was gone, he had no reason to remain on her side. In fact, that room itself would soon no longer be hers.

He had no way of knowing what would happen to Olay Blueshake after that.

The only things that remained after her money disappeared were her enemies.

In fact, once they knew Olay’s money was gone, the anger of those she had held down would erupt. It was likely anger would even be sparked in those who she could no longer pay and those she had allied in the black market. And with the history of abuse between Olay and Lindy, Lindy and the “excessive gift” she had just received would be against her too.

“I-I have a thought,” said her aide.

As ordered, her aide gave her the best option available to her.

It was the fate of one who had lost it all.

“W-wouldn’t it be best if you purposefully showed yourself and had yourself imprisoned for your own safety?”

“Y-you mean I remain broke…?

“Yes.”

“A-and go to prison…?”

“Yes! Before long, it will become known that we are here, so now is your only chance to act!!”

Part 2

(Information)

Manual % “Knowledge12” has disconnected the circuit.

Manual % “Unknown” has connected.

FCE restarting.

Username “Unknown” has reconstructed the FCE surveillance network.

Part 3

(November 10th – Oahu – Honolulu International Hotel – From the lounge security camera)

Kamijou and the others were watching breaking news on the large television in the lounge.

However, this news was not about Lindy Blueshake.

Another piece of news had run right after that one.

“Twenty-seven of Academy City’s cooperative institutions have made a joint declaration.”

A cool, steady voice began speaking.

“We are deeply concerned over the likelihood that Academy City personnel intervened in the recent issues in the Hawaiian Islands. We do not wish to hold power that can easily influence the flow of events of an entire nation, especially one large enough to be known as the world police. We began cooperating with Academy City in order to increase the benefits for both parties, but our roots remain in our respective countries. Dispatching personnel to alter the history of other countries like this is not what we would call ‘cooperation’. We may work for Academy City, but we are not its slaves.” The voice paused for a second. “As the twenty-seven largest cooperative institutions, we are now ending all cooperation with Academy City. This is a necessary step to protect our own countries.”

Kamijou Touma’s face paled.

He had just been shown what his actions to save someone looked like from a different angle.

Or perhaps that had been the objective of the events in Hawaii all along.

“Was Olay Blueshake not the only one looking through her FCE? Did the cooperative institutions force their way into the network too?”

And then he remembered something.

He remembered who it had been that had told him that Gremlin was in Hawaii and had invited them to take action to stop their plan.

And this person was a magician.

She was a magician who was not on the side of justice and protecting the peace like the Anglican Church.

“Birdway…”

He looked around, but she was nowhere to be seen.

“Birdway!!”

Kamijou looked out of the lounge and into the hotel lobby, but Birdway and her subordinates in black were gone. He pulled out his cell phone. He knew there was no guarantee she would answer, but she surprisingly did.

“So even now you can’t come to your own conclusions without my help?”

“Did you have us come here knowing this would happen?”

“Twenty-seven is quite a lot. Decision making takes time and each of the companies is too highly specialized to function independently. Most likely, they will gather into three or four large groups before long.”

“Answer my question, Birdway! Are you…are you…”

Twenty-seven major cooperative institutions breaking off from Academy City.

A civil war within the science side.

That would put Gremlin in a good position to gain a lot of power.

“*Are you part of Gremlin!?*”

Kamijou was afraid to hear the answer to that question.

But Birdway’s response was simple.

“…I’ll leave that up to your imagination.”

That was it.

She hung up.

As Kamijou squeezed his phone tightly in his hand, he heard the announcer on the news.

“The technology of the cooperative institutions that made this declaration is not up to the level of Academy City, but they were loaned a great number of leading edge unmanned weapons during World War III which are still in use after the war for the sake of keeping the peace. If these weapons are not returned, it is possible a large scale military conflict will break out with Academy City made weapons on both sides.”

Part 4

(November 10th – Oahu – Honolulu International Hotel – From the cell phone camera of a guest in the lobby)

“*Are you part of Gremlin!?*”

Mikoto heard those words when she chased after Kamijou upon noticing his odd behavior.

She could not hear the details of what he was saying.

And shortly thereafter the conversation was over.

For a short while, Kamijou Touma merely stared at the small screen of his phone. He stared blankly. His spiritless expression was not like that boy's usual self at all.

Mikoto half-instinctually realized that something was very, very wrong.

She recognized that expression. Misaka Mikoto had once been wrapped up in a large incident involving clones. Her mind and body had been driven to their limits and she had decided to try to crush the one behind the incident, knowing full well she would be destroyed. The expression on that boy's face was the same one she had had back then.

What did that boy know?

Where was he headed?

Mikoto did not know the details, but she could make a guess. Someone with that expression was not headed for the goal. Even if he had hundreds of paths spread out before him, each and every one only led to failure and the depths of hell.

He was at a crossroads.

She knew that the slightest mistake could greatly change the path that boy headed down.

But…

"(…I am here.)"

Mikoto repressed her heart that threatened to be overwhelmed and headed forward.

She took a single step.

She was clearly headed for that boy.

"(I won't just watch. I won't just learn what happened after the fact. I am here. I am in a place where I can change the reality I see before my eyes!!)"

How had it been for that boy?

That boy had stood before her during that clone incident when she was determined to head off to her own destruction. What kind of conviction had he held that stood up to that pressure that seemed to distort even the atmosphere?

She did not care if she was not thinking the same thing he had at that time.

As long as she could bring that boy back, she did not care.

"(I grabbed that idiot's hand and came this far.)"

She would reach him.

She could reach him.

"(I did that because I wanted this chance to drag him back to where he belongs!!)"

But then the boy suddenly moved his thumb, turning off his cell phone.

"…I was wrong," he whispered.

His voice was cracking. The amplitude of his voice was low, so it was hard to hear. However, that short sentence was enough to make Mikoto feel like her feet had been sewn to the floor. Those words of a defeated man were enough to stab through the gears of her mind like some kind of curse.

"I was wrong!! She set it all up from the beginning! Why didn't I see it? I had so many chances to notice. All the information on Gremlin our actions were based on came from the Dawn-Colored Sunlight, so why didn't I think of the possibility of them having some ulterior motive!?"

"The Dawn-Colored Sunlight…?"

"Birdway. Leivinia Birdway. She and her subordinates used the incident here in Hawaii. She created a confrontation between Academy City and its cooperative institutions to damage the science side!! …There's no guarantee that the newly independent cooperative institutions will follow the rules of the science side. If Gremlin wants to obtain technology and the power of the science side, they now have the perfect opportunity!!"

The balance between science and magic had crumbled.

Gremlin had torn it apart.

"…Misaka. I will not be returning to Academy City." That boy clearly declared his intention to set foot in that strange world. "I will make up for this failure. I will not return until I do so. Until I resolve everything related to this terrible result, I have no right to return to my normal life!"

"This wasn't…"

Her paralyzed thoughts started shaking.

That small tremor held power.

“This wasn’t a failure.”

Clearly this time, she spoke.

No matter how overwhelmed she felt, there was something she had to deny.

“No matter who we were used by, we still…you still protected the people of Hawaii from Gremlin!! I won’t let you deny that fact. I won’t let you say that saving those people was a failure!!”

“Those people being saved was part of Birdway’s plan. Now if the conflict between Academy City and the cooperative institutions intensifies, those people saved will surely feel that others are being hurt because they were saved. I cannot allow those people to bear that burden. As the one saved by the Dawn-Colored Sunlight in the Arctic and used by them, I alone should bear that burden!!”

There was a difference between having made a decision of one’s own free will to get involved and merely getting wrapped up in something.

This time, Kamijou Touma had been one of the people who had made a decision at the beginning. And he had clearly failed. That was why he planned to carry that weight alone. He would ensure those who had been given no option would not be seen as villains. He would ensure that those saved in Hawaii would not be called the cause of it all.

That idea in itself may not have been wrong.

It may not have been something that could be defeated with an impromptu rebuttal.

And so…

“…Then I will bear that burden too.”

“Mi…saka?”

“You say your decision here in Hawaii was wrong, but I made that decision too! If I had chosen differently, this may have turned out differently. And I had opportunities to speak with that Birdway girl, so I too might have been able to see her true intentions beforehand!! I overlooked that, so I won’t let you bear this alone. Just because you were wrong about something does not mean you need to bear it all alone!!”

Having said that, Mikoto felt a little refreshed.

It may have been partly due to the boy's dumbfounded expression.

Mikoto added one last thing as a finishing blow.

"You and I are heading down the same path. Don't forget that."

Part 5

(November 10th – Oahu – Honolulu International Airport – From the camera in a handheld game system forgotten on the lobby sofa)

Incidentally, Misaka Mikoto had forgotten one thing.

She finally remembered it when she felt something in her palm. However, she closed her hand to hide what was there.

They were two rings.

They were the Cupid Arrow tag rings.

They were made of titanium so the pair of rings could be colored using electrolysis which would create a unique pattern for the pair. Unscientific rumors said that technique worked as a charm to prevent cheating.

At a fundamental level, Mikoto did not believe in unscientific phenomena.

Due to strange things happening before her eyes during World War III and during the events in Hawaii, she understood that apparently some unexplainable things existed in the world. However, even when she saw them, she would not readily identify them as "the occult".

And that was why, as she put the rings back in her pocket, there were some questions the answers to which she did not even consider.

What did it mean that she had not given him the ring? Had something happened that had led to her being unable to do so?

Part 6

(November 10th – Oahu – Honolulu International Hotel – From the camera in a tablet on the table used for placing orders in the lounge)

Kamijou Touma ended up being dragged around the airport by Mikoto.

Kamijou was honestly thankful for what Mikoto had said.

However, he had the following thoughts.

I cannot allow someone who would go that far for me to get wrapped up in all this.

I really do need to settle this on my own.

A few dozen centimeters.

A small action not taken.

That was all it took for the future to change.

Part 7

(November 10th – Oahu – Diamond Beach – Cell Phone Store – From the camera in a cell phone on the store's counter)

America had simplified the cell phone business much further than Japan, so the stores were overflowing with prepaid models. A few sample phones were lined up in an open air stand type of store. A girl was using her index finger to fiddle with a sample smartphone.

Oftentimes sample phones were dummies, but being able to test out how using it felt was one of the major selling points for that smartphone. Perhaps some things were difficult to imagine just by hearing an explanation.

The girl had silver braids and brown skin.

She wore overalls directly over her bare skin and wore glasses.

"This thing is fun, but I'm not sure fun is enough to warrant buying a second phone…"

“It isn’t just a phone. You can think of it as a small internet terminal. Carrying a computer around all the time is a pain, right?”

“Those have gotten pretty small themselves, though.”

“It’s the same thing as air conditioning, cell phones, and convenience stores. You didn’t miss them when you had never used them, but once you start using them, you can’t get by without. A smartphone is another one of those convenient goods.”

“…You make it sound like I’d be better off never using one. That sounds like something out of a drug PSA.”

The brown girl and the clerk went through the standard dialogue.

The girl then made the screen slide to the side and had her interest grabbed by the preset applications.

“Hehh. You can bring up a map.”

“You can do anything. If you get lost with one of these, there has to be something wrong with your brain.”

“It’s amazing that such a small device can connect with the satellites up in space,” said the girl as she repeatedly swiped her index finger across the map.

And then something odd happened.

The map screen suddenly blurred and when the clerk tried to fix it, screen after screen he did not recognize appeared. It was not a mere malfunction. Some kind of different code had been overwritten into the device.

“Okay, if it’s this high level a device, maybe I can link it with my spiritual item. And it uses gold in the chips.”

“What are you—?”

“Brace yourself,” said the girl slowly just as a brilliant white light fell down from the heavens.

It struck a few kilometers away, but a shockwave assaulted them like from a lightning strike. The roof of the open air stand type of store was blown off and slammed into creaking palm trees. The clerk was knocked over, but instead of fear, his expression was that of someone faced with difficulty.

“I’ll take it.”

“Hah? …Hah?”

“I said I’ll take it. Oh, and I don’t need a contract. I’ve changed the settings so I can use it without one.”

At that point, a high-pitched noise like crystal being struck rang out.

The brown girl looked over to see an unnatural object approaching. It looked like a drum made of black stone.

It was unlikely anyone else there realized it was the result of utterly remodeling a human being.

The brown girl spoke lightly as if speaking to a childhood friend.

“Hey, you really are spoiled, aren’t you? If you keep following me around like this, *a certain exhausted Dvergr* might just have to sit down for a rest on you.”

Without waiting for approval, the brown girl sat right down on top of the drum.

She immediately brought her finger to the smartphone’s screen and started operating it with a gleeful expression. That aspect followed the stereotypical response of someone using that type of device almost exactly.

However, what she said after she made a call was clearly not normal.

“Hey. Saronia A. Irivika failed. As expected. Right now, they’re probably breathing a sigh of relief over having saved the United States. None of them would ever imagine that we achieved our goal *back when Kilauea erupted*,” whispered the brown girl with a smile. She seemed to be speaking to no one in particular rather than into the phone. “You would think they would find it odd. The Trigger was supposed to cause an artificial eruption in Kilauea, but the type of lava was changed as well. Normally, thick lava should have come spewing out, but for some reason smooth volcanic ash came out instead. *Normally, you would think there was some other trick at play, don’t you think*?”

“What about the output?”

“It was within acceptable levels I guess. As far as natural reactors go, it’s above Iceland. The necessary energy was extracted and solidified, so we’re done here. I guess you could say stage 1 is complete.”

“This is a long process.”

“The fact that I had to be called in should have told you this wouldn’t be easy. Anyway, how is the blueprint coming along?”

“I have a report for the natural Valkyrie…*Brunhild Eiktobel was it?* It seems to be only a portion of the spear, but if she can use it, then we are in the clear.”

“I see. Then let’s do this.” The brown girl grinned. “We have a steady path to Gungnir, Odin.”

“Yes we do, Dvergr.”

The girl ended the call with a tap of her index finger and the black cylinder she was sitting on started rattling around.

“Stop that. How rude. I’m not heavy. Next we need to think about what to do about the Academy City cooperative institutions that have broken away. …Hm?”

The brown girl suddenly looked up because she saw a magician covered in wounds approaching.

“Umm, who are you?”

“…Cendrillon…”

“Hm…? Oh, right, right. I remember now! You’re the French magician that was easily taken out at the airport. What happened to you after that? I thought your head was smashed in.”

“I managed to escape during all the confusion of Kilauea erupting and Trident invading. But more importantly…” She spat out some blood. “What was all that about?”

“What was all what about?”

“All that about expecting the plan to fail, Kilauea as a reactor, and Gungnir!!”

“You don’t know about any of that because we never told you.”

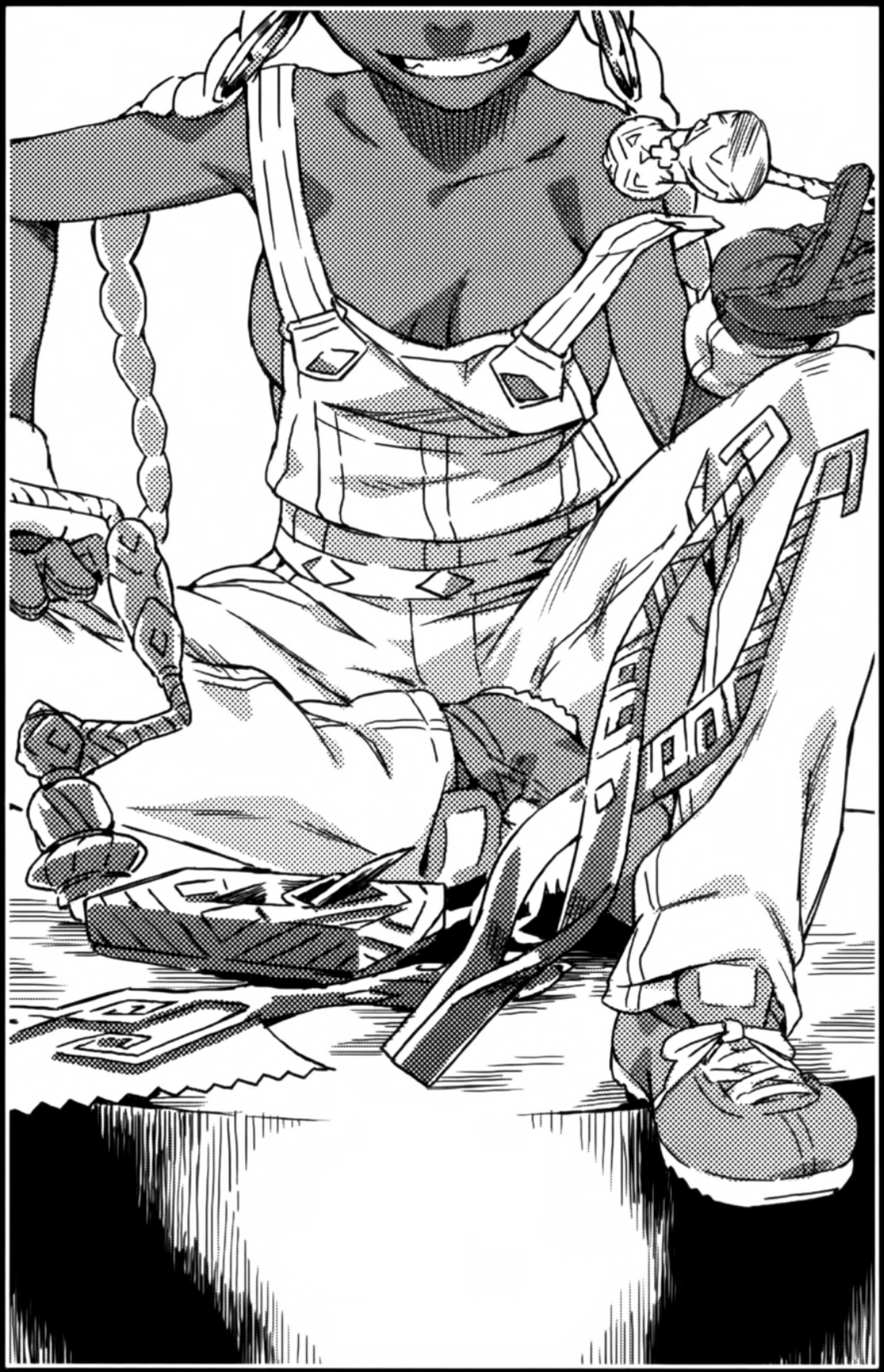
“Weren’t we trying to bring down America using Trident in order to twist the balance between the magic side and science side by turning the United States into a theocracy!?”

“Of course not,” said the brown girl still sitting atop the cylinder. “In fact, Gremlin isn’t even a collection of losers from that war.”

For a bit, Cendrillon’s mind went completely blank.

Meanwhile, the brown girl continued to speak.

“I won’t deny that we were created by that war, but our objective lies elsewhere. Really, you all were only temporary workers. We didn’t want to lose any of the actual members, but this couldn’t have been completed without some sacrifices. The easiest way to get around that was to get some recruits by saying whatever would bring them aboard. It really worked well. That was how we got Trident, Saronia, and you. You did manage to contribute to the organization though, so you can pride yourself in that.”



“Why you goddamn—!!”

Using her magic that gave her overwhelming speed, Cendrillon tried to grab at the brown girl.

The brown girl got down from the cylinder as if she had fallen off backwards at the same time as bluish-white sparks scattered from the front of the cylinder.

“Gyah!?”

They quickly pierced through Cendrillon’s body, bringing her down.

The brown girl lifted just her upper body up from the ground and said, “C’mon now. If you’re taking on someone with projectiles, you need to find cover first. You can’t even get close to a method of defeating Mjölnir, my prized creation here. Our output is great enough to roast the snake that wraps around the world. I won’t say brains are everything when it comes to magic, but if you have difficulty with calculations, you shouldn’t be on the front lines.”

While grinning, she stuck her hands into the open sides of her overalls and pulled out a few tools.

She had a hammer, a screwdriver, a saw, a hand drill, a file, a plane, and others.

Other than the fact that they were all made of gold, it would not have been surprising to find any of them in a hardware store.

“Now then, Marian Slingeneyer, one of the extremely rare Dvergr, has a question for Cendrillon, a former French elite who is not only a loser but is starting to complain and is becoming quite annoying,” said the brown girl as she took those tools that certainly did not look like objects that could alter a human’s form and lined them up atop the cylindrical “human”. “You are about to lose your current form. Which would you rather be remodeled into while still alive, a table or a wardrobe?”

Part 8

(November 10th – Oahu – New Honolulu International Airport – From the entrance gate security camera)

Leivinia Birdway had come to the airport.

One of her many black-wearing subordinates, Mark Space, gently spoke to her.

“Was that really the best way to leave that?”

“Given what I did, it’s only natural for him to criticize me.”

“I think you should have told him your true intentions.”

“How would that have helped?” Birdway gave a cynical smile. “You’re saying I should have told him that we wouldn’t be able to see the full extent of the organization just by defeating Saronia A. Irivika, that it was necessary to bring the magicians closer to the center of Gremlin to the surface, and that to do that we needed to split the science side in half leaving the cooperative institutions as bait?”

“It is an effective method. Gremlin went as far as to bring science side aspects into their magical constructions. It will not be easy for them to find an organization large enough to replace Trident and the America’s media queen. And *that collection of cooperative institutions has Academy City unmanned weapons*. Gremlin’s ultimate objective may be unclear, but if they require scientific power to accomplish it, no bait could be more tempting.”

“But it isn’t a sure thing. If they suspect it to be a trap, then it’s all for nothing.”

“Even if they do suspect a trap, they will take action based on that suspicion. Gremlin wishes for an anti-Academy City structure that is on their side. They do not want this collection of cooperative institutions to interfere and destroy the balance of influence. Whether they cooperate with them or make enemies of them, Gremlin’s next action will be centered on that collection of cooperative institutions. That means *they function as bait either way*.”

“And so you’re saying our actions were just? Don’t be foolish,” Birdway said without hesitation. “Whatever our reasons, we still led those twenty-seven cooperative institutions to leave Academy City and diverge from the side that protects the world.”

“…”

“They may have already had this desire deep down, but I am the one that purposefully drew it out. They will now be criticized by others as those who are destroying the world’s peace and if they are directly attacked, there will be casualties. And it may not end there. I simply don’t see how doing that can be called just.”

Birdway paused for a second at that point.

It was as if she was reaffirming the position at which she stood.

“I don’t recall ever saying I stood on the side of justice, boy.”

AFTERWORD

To those who have bought the volumes one at a time: welcome back. To those who bought them all at once: welcome.

This is Kamachi Kazuma.

New Testament has reached its third volume! The stage for this volume is the Hawaiian Islands. I put a bit of a restriction on how things were presented, but that was to go along with a certain gimmick.

The occult keyword was people-controlling magic.

However, as also indicated in the volume, I don't think there is any type of occult that would make an investigation more of a pain in the ass. Even if someone acts in accordance to the spell user's instructions, it can be unclear whether that is actually the occult or if they are cheated by planning it together earlier. The issue might be similar to the question of whether a supposed genius dog is actually doing the calculations in its head.

Since I was dealing with the remnants left by World War III, I of course went with Russia. Since I was going with the Russian Orthodox Church, I went with a fairy. However, I felt something like the Lorelei was too straightforward, so I did some research to see if there was a more twisted one. What I found was the Leshy. Like many other fairies, the Leshy has a frightening side of not hesitating to kill, but it has a bit of charm too.

And of course Cendrillon uses a similar method to Vasilisa from the Russian Orthodox Church, so I guess you can check that out too.

We've really started to get into the Imagine Breaker countermeasures now.

I think you will be able to sense a different feel to those who appeared at the end than with the Russian remnant types.

I give my thanks to my illustrator, Haimura-san, and my editor, Miki-san. This story was probably a bit of a pain due to having so many people in it. I am truly thankful that they have stuck with me this far.

I also give my thanks to all the readers. It is thanks to all of you that I am allowed to write these stores that are such a pain. I am truly thankful.

It is time to close the pages for now while praying that the pages of the next book will be opened.

And I lay my pen down for now.

The name of the Magic God has finally appeared.

-Kamachi Kazuma